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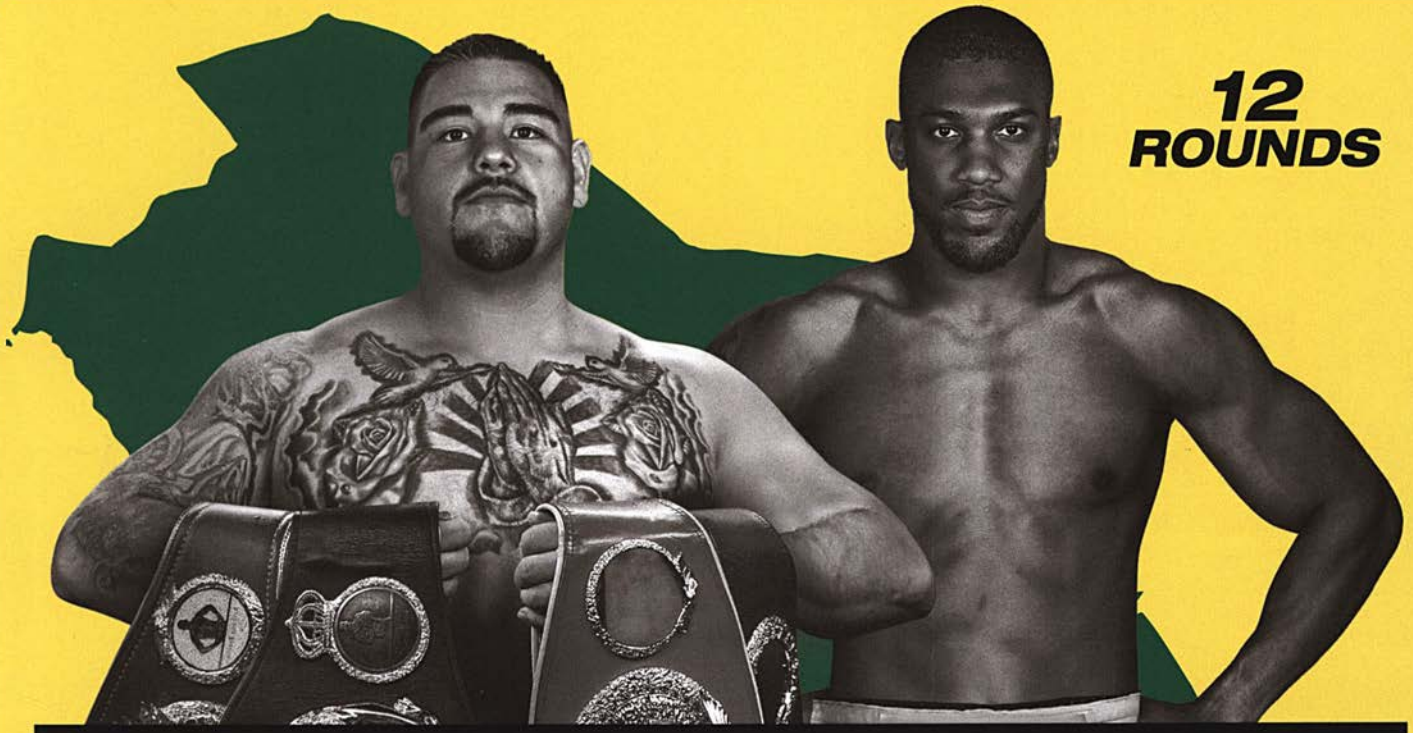

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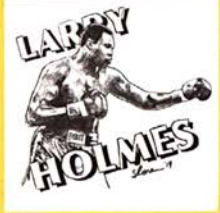

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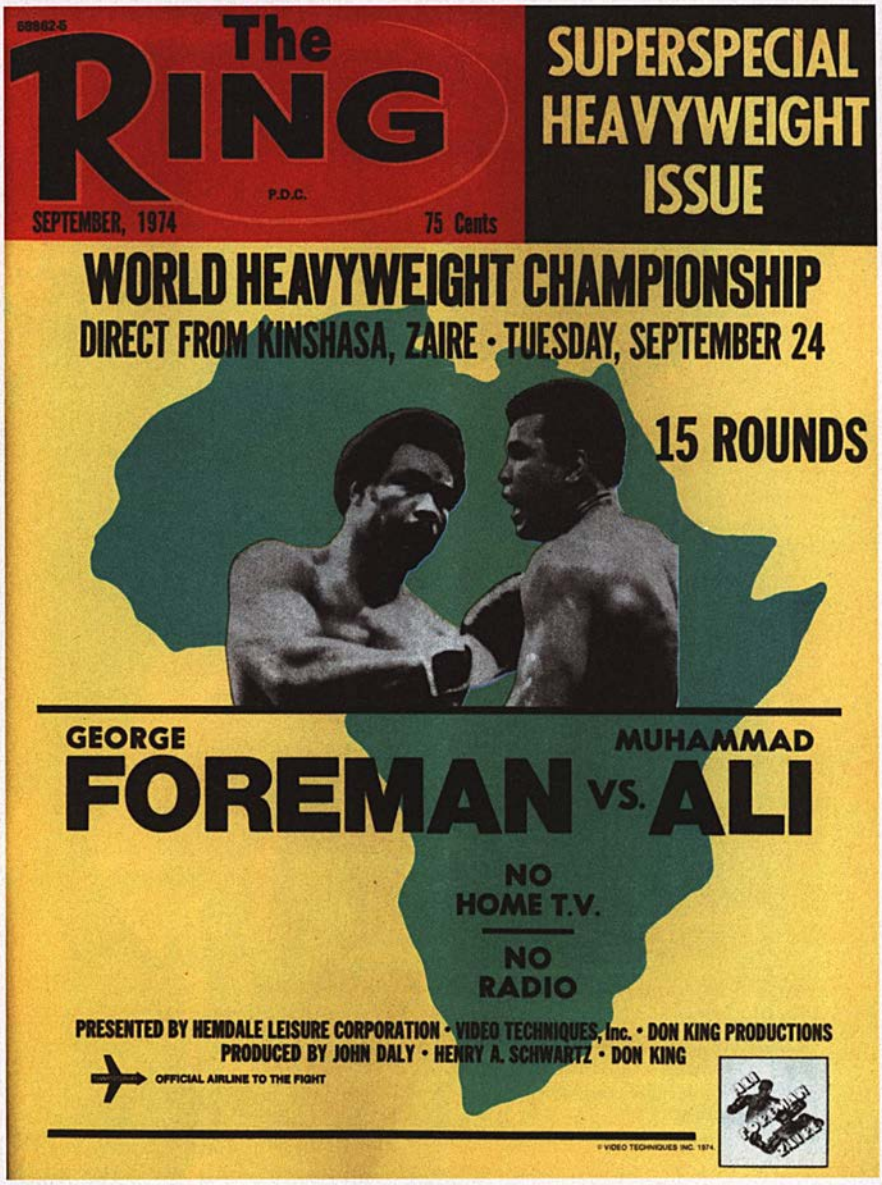
OPENING SHOT

Erica Farias (left) and a ferocious-looking Jessica McCaskill exchange punches during their rematch on the Aleksandr Usyk-Chazz Witherspoon card on October 12 in Chicago. McCaskill retained the WBC and WBA 140-pound titles with a majority decision.

PHOTO BY DYLAN BUELL



Like the "Rumble in the Jungle" 45 years ago, Ruiz-Joshua 2 will take place in a country rife with human rights abuses.

ON OUR COVER:

This issue's cover will be recognizable to collectors and those readers who were around in the 1970s. It harkens back to the September '74 issue previewing Muhammad Ali vs. George Foreman – the iconic "Rumble in the Jungle" that took place on October 30 of that year in Kinshasa, Zaire. We've reimagined that cover to portray the upcoming rematch between unified heavyweight titleholder Andy Ruiz Jr. and Anthony Joshua on December 7 in Diriyah, Saudi Arabia.

As with Ali-Foreman, the fight's location has been criticized as an indefensible image-booster for a country with a track record of human rights abuse toward its own citizens. And that controversy continues, as represented by an email we received from reader Alistair Strachan in response to a story about the Ruiz-Joshua rematch in our November issue ("Don't Get Rowdy, We're Going to Saudi"). Mr. Strachan wrote, in part, "I'm sick of reading that the 1974 heavyweight title fight between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman was held in Kinshasa, Zaire, which at the time was ruled by a despotic regime, as if almost ancient precedent somehow excuses the current egregious decision regarding Saudi Arabia. The Rumble in the Jungle happened within a decade of many U.S. states being openly racist but, thankfully, nobody is trying to justify racism in the modern day by citing what may have been deemed the norm in the 1970s. It's equally disingenuous to excuse the blatant money-grab by Joshua's promoter, Eddie Hearn, in taking his fighter's rematch to a desert kingdom that will do anything to enhance its modernizing credentials in the eyes of the West while continuing to behave reprehensibly."

The author of that feature and key engineer of this month's cover concept, Associate Editor Tom Gray, acknowledges the troubling aspects of the fight's venue – and also did so in his story – but defends the juxtaposition: "The Rumble in the Jungle comparison was made because as bad as the dictatorship was in Zaire at that time – and it was beyond horrendous – that event is still generally regarded as the most famous fight in boxing history. The reality is that many of the same critics panning Ruiz-Joshua 2 for its locale haven't given that the slightest thought. Decades may have passed, but there's an air of hypocrisy there, which I thought was worth exploring. I wasn't justifying anything."

Both sides of the argument have merit. Our cover is a reverential throwback to a huge heavyweight fight taking place in an unorthodox location, but we must also remind ourselves about the problems in both Zaire of the 1970s and Saudi Arabia of today. In covering boxing, we cannot pretend that these issues do not exist. Fans of boxing (and journalists) who are otherwise excited to see a historic rematch in Ruiz-Joshua 2 can simultaneously be upset about where it will happen.

PROUD BUCKEYE

Shawn Porter put on a brilliant display of skill, conditioning, and guts in his slugfest with Errol Spence Jr. on September 28 in Los Angeles (Porter lost a split decision). What was most impressive was his ability to adapt when he needed to against such a formidable opponent. Porter looked sharp in employing his normal swarming style, but he did it in a more controlled way and was not reckless. He also showed his ability to box when he had to. The Porter camp should be commended for his phenomenal conditioning and ability to adjust during the fight. Porter was relentless and looked like a man on a mission. He certainly proved that he can hang with – if not beat – the division's elite. Porter is a champion inside and outside of the ring, and he made the entire state of Ohio proud with his valiant effort.

Daniel McKrell
Parma, Ohio

OTHER AUSSIES

I recently saw that Jeff Fenech was rated as Australia's greatest boxer by Ring Magazine ("20-20 Vision" https://bit.ly/2Jjsmmd). This, I believe, was an oversight, as Australia has produced many great fighters over the years who would have had equally as impressive amounts of titles had they fought in later eras. Most know Lionel Rose and Johnny Famechon, two of Australia's first world champions. I would have liked to see Dave Sands and Jack Carroll added to this list. Sands was rated as a top contender at middleweight and light heavyweight before his untimely death. Twice he defeated Carl "Bobo" Olson. Carroll was the top contender for many years at welterweight during the reigns of Jimmy McLarnin and Barney Ross. While Fenech was a fantastic fighter, I don't believe his achievements would have been possible in a past era such as those Sands and Carroll fought in, with less chance to become world champion.

Charles Paisley
Melbourne, Australia

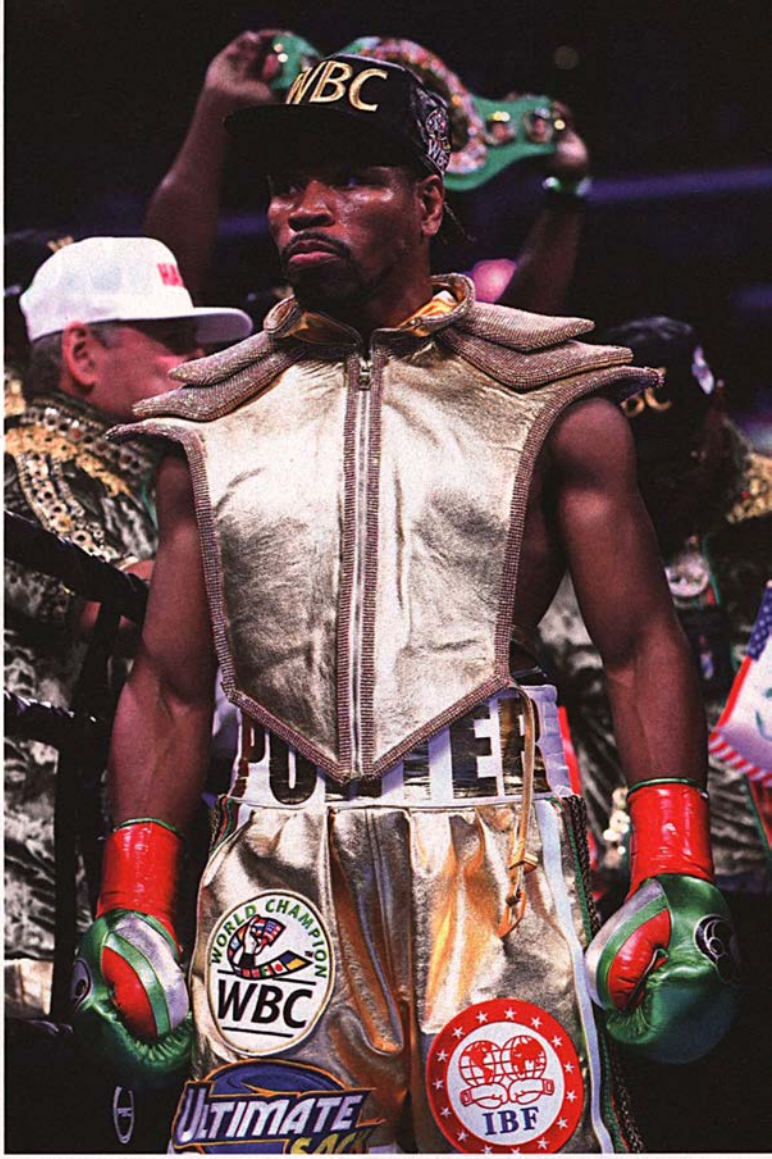
HOLD THE TOMATOES

I remember back in the 1970s when Madison Square Garden was putting on monthly fight cards at what was then the Felt Forum. They were televised, and the broadcasters would offer free tickets to the following month's card to callers. They would mention that the third or fifth caller would win, but my brother and I were convinced that they gave tickets to every caller, because he would call and win every time. So, every other month we would attend the live fights.

The Garden had its own fight promotion division back then, and these cards were showcases for the Garden's fighters. On the printed programs, the Garden fighters were always listed in the left column, the "opponents" on the right. I remember one evening when there were 14 fights on the program and the fighters in the left column won 13 of them. Some months the Garden fighters scored a clean sweep.

I was reminded of those cards by Gennadiy Golovkin vs. Sergiy Derevyanchenko on October 5, only this time the fights took place in the main arena. Who promoted that card? Contadina? I haven't seen so many tomato cans on one card since the '70s. The main event was a classic. All the rest of the televised fights were pretty ludicrous.

Leslie Gerber
Woodstock, N.Y.



Reader Daniel McKrell says fellow Ohioan Shawn Porter proved to be an elite welterweight with his performance against Errol Spence Jr.

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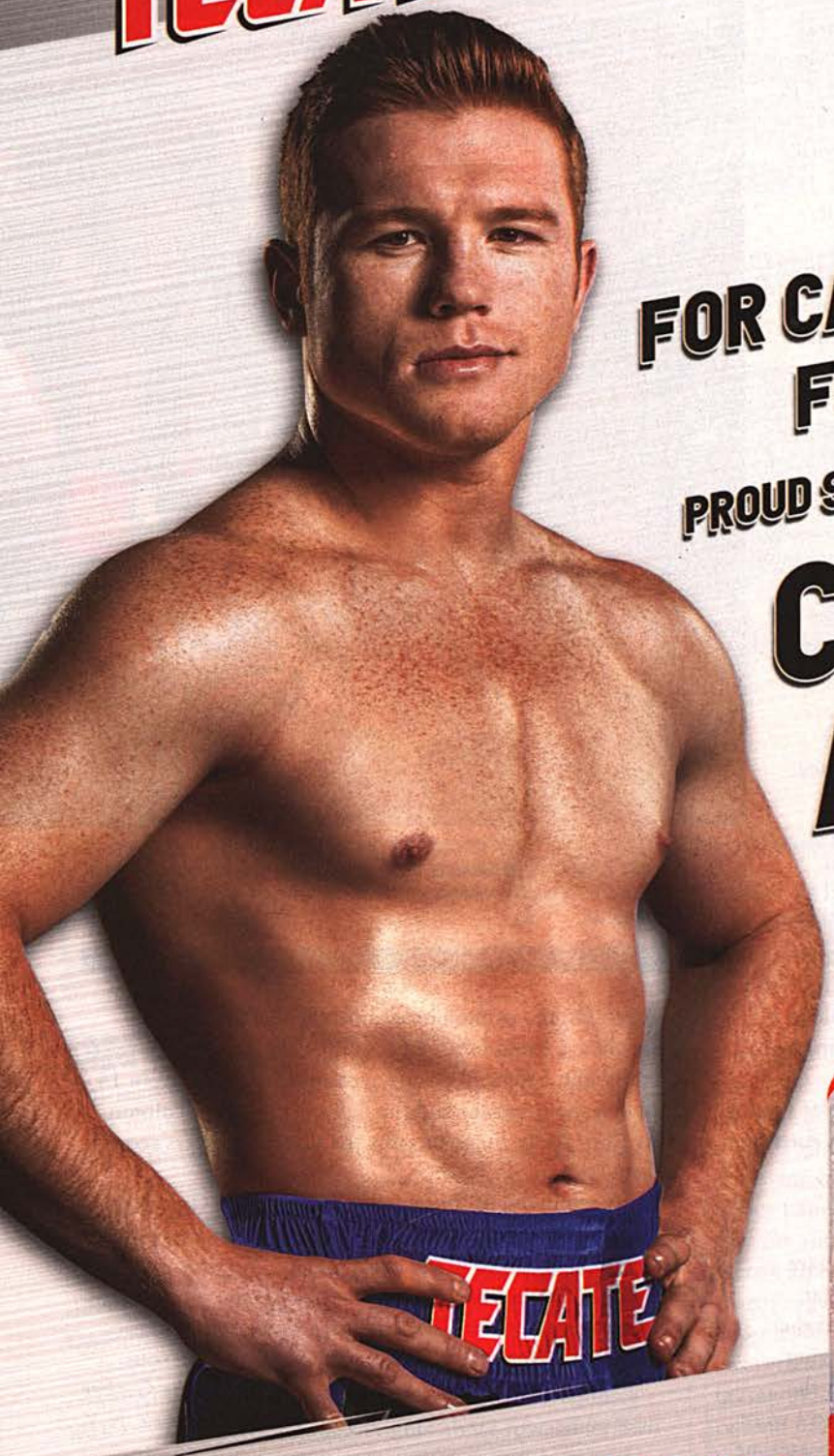

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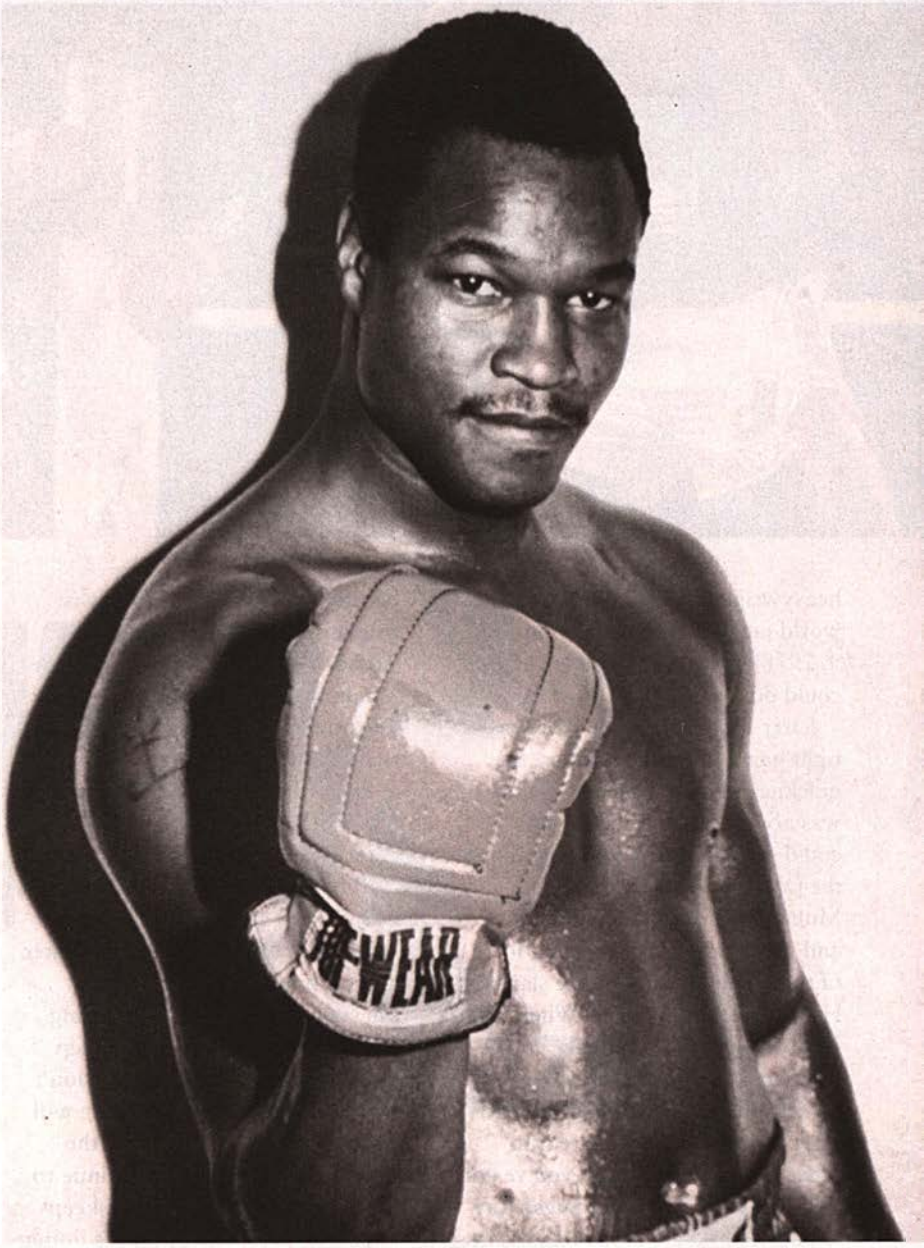
BLASTING FROM THE PAST



Larry Holmes says today's heavyweights need to work on becoming complete fighters.

In my day, we would fight anybody at any time, and we were always ready to fight. Today's heavyweights worry too much about who they're fighting, and that's what's wrong. When you're in the top 10, most of your opponents should be in the top 10. In my day, we fought for money, of course, but we also fought for glory.

In terms of skills, most of these guys can't put their punches together. There's hardly anyone at heavyweight using combinations. The guys who are around today are just too big and slow. They need to lose some weight. When I fought for the WBC

Heavier isn't better, says Holmes, who weighed 209 when he dethroned Ken Norton and 211 when he beat his idol, Muhammad Ali.

heavyweight championship of the world (against Ken Norton on June 9, 1978), I was 209 pounds and I could do anything.

Larry Holmes had the jab, the right hand, the combinations, the quickness, the movement – there was no one else out there who could do that. When you talk about the jab, nobody jabbed like me. Muhammad Ali had a good jab and good combinations, but a lot of those combinations were slappy. His jab wasn't like mine. When I hit you with the jab, you know you've been hit with the jab. My jab was like a right hand; it wasn't just a setup. I can't even compare it to other heavyweights' jabs; you've got to look at the little guys. Sugar Ray Leonard could jab in his weight class, Tommy Hearns, but they obviously didn't have the power I had. At my best, nobody could beat me. Not only that, but if I did get hit, nobody could take a punch like me.

Anthony Joshua is good, strong, but he doesn't know how to jab. And in that last fight, it didn't look like he could take a punch. It's hard to keep track of what's going on at heavyweight these days. Everyone thought Andy Ruiz couldn't fight because he's heavy, but that was probably an illusion. When I met Anthony Joshua, I wanted to teach him how to jab, how to mix up the jab, how to follow the jab with a right hand – bing, bing.

Ruiz will be motivated to win this rematch. He'll be just as determined as he was last time, but he'll be even more confident because he's done it already.

Deontay Wilder is a good fighter, a good puncher, tall. He's got the stamina. He's got a lot going for himself. But he's got to keep working on his skills. If you don't work on your game, someone will figure you out. Wilder's got the right hand, and that'll continue to work for him, providing he keeps knocking everyone out. He's doing OK, but whenever he meets a guy who can move, who can duck under the big punches that he throws, he's got a problem.

I haven't seen much of Tyson Fury recently, but I hear things about him. He's good, but he's not fighting anybody right now.

The big problem is there's no one around to teach these guys how to fight. I had Richie Giachetti, Eddie Futch and Ray Arcel around. These guys didn't make me fight better, but they would remind me of things. You would have confidence with guys like that in the corner. "Throw that left hook! Throw that right hand! Keep your hands up!" These guys were the best trainers in the world. That's how you learn in boxing. Great trainers are there to remind you what to do at the right time.

If I was around today against these big guys, my thing would be not to let them get close. You've got to be able to move your head, see the punches coming, block them, jab back and get your punches off. If I was around today, I would be the heavyweight champion of the world for 15 years. I could still handle a lot of these guys when I was 52 years old. Just imagine me at 22, 32 or 42. These guys today wouldn't stand a chance. RING

Larry Holmes, Hall of Famer and former heavyweight champion of the world.

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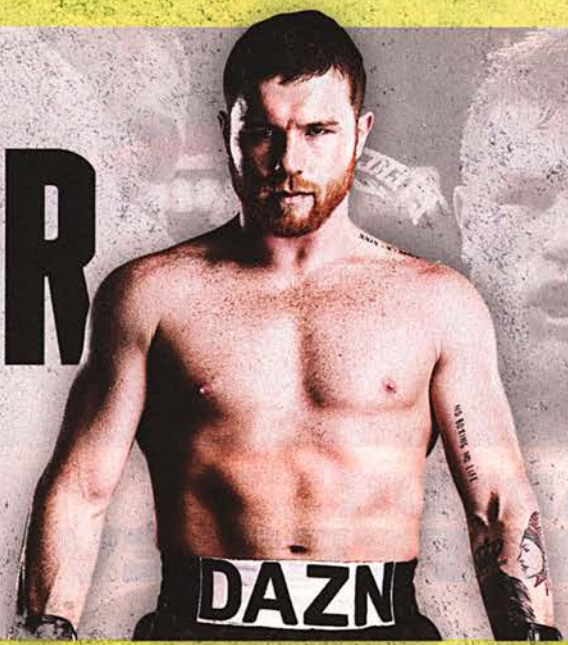

DECEMBER
RUIZ VS JOSHUA 2

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ROUND 1

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH ★ NEW FACES ★ AND MORE!

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

ARTUR BETERBIEV

We knew Beterbiev could punch going into his title unification bout vs. Oleksandr Gvozdyk, but the Russian reminded us that he's also a technical fighter.

Just looking at Artur Beterbiev's record – 15 fights, 15 knockouts – it would be easy to pigeonhole him as the latest in a growing line of seek-and-destroy, heavy-handed Russians. It's not that you'd be wrong. After nine rounds of being assaulted by Beterbiev, Oleksandr Gvozdyk was a case of musculoskeletal rebellion, his bones struggling to keep him upright while every soft tissue in his body wanted to lie down and sleep. He wasn't so much standing as draping. The ESPN-televised main event in Philadelphia was more than a thugfest, however. Both men in the ring that mid-October night were Olympians, both were undefeated as pros, both had brought a world title with them and each showed diverse repertoires stacked with accurate punches during the fight. So it wasn't outlandish that Gvozdyk had two cards in his favor going into the late rounds.

But while Beterbiev's roots might be in the skills of an elite amateur, the added combination of armor-plated toughness and pitiless aggression puts him on another level. His wrecking-ball rights had Gvozdyk woozy when the bell ended the ninth round, and 60 seconds on a stool were nowhere near enough for the Ukrainian to prepare for the 10th, in which he met the canvas twice before finally crumbling a third time to experience his first loss. What the future holds for the 34-year-old winner isn't as exciting, as he appears bound for China to face IBF mandatory Cheng Fanlong. After that, however, further unification is the goal for Beterbiev and promoter Bob Arum, with Sergey Kovalev and Canelo Alvarez as potential candidates to enter the Russian's theater of pain.

NEW FACES

LORENZO SIMPSON

By Anson Wainwright

Junior middleweight prospect

Lorenzo Simpson had a tough beginning to life growing up in Baltimore. His father was murdered when he was still a toddler, a victim of the street violence that plagues the city. Simpson, the middle child of three, grew up with anger issues but had a good mother and supportive family that helped keep him away from gangs and inner-city crime.

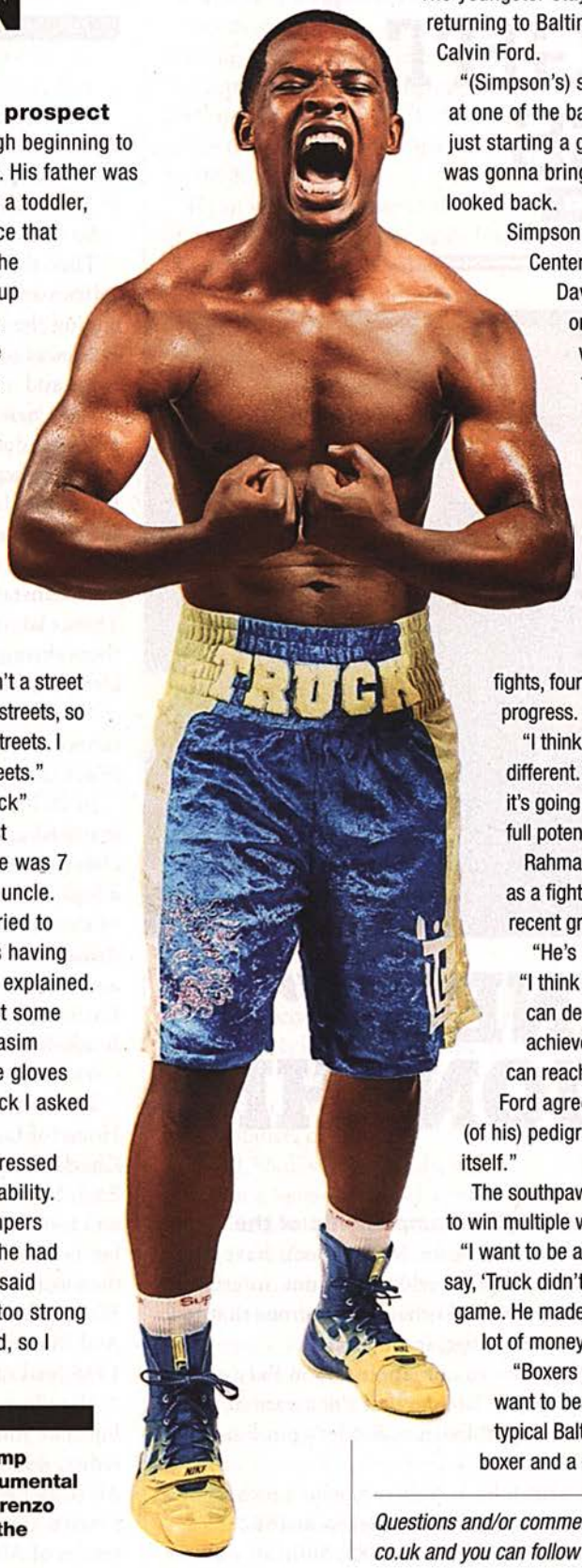
"Baltimore is a real small ghetto town," Simpson told The Ring. "I like the good parts of Baltimore. It made me the person I am. I think everybody in Baltimore goes through something, but I wasn't a street kid. My family came from the streets, so they kept me away from the streets. I never wanted to be on the streets."

Simpson, nicknamed "Truck" because of his strength, first encountered boxing when he was 7 years old through a famous uncle.

"Hasim Rahman was married to my father's sister, and I was having real bad temper issues," he explained. "I moved to Las Vegas to get some discipline, and I was with Hasim Rahman in camp. He put the gloves on me, and when I came back I asked my mom if I could box."

Rahman was suitably impressed with his nephew's physical ability.

"When he was still in Pampers he was doing push-ups, so he had that work ethic from then," said Rahman. "He was just way too strong for a typical 4- or 5-year-old, so I always knew he was going to be something special if he did anything physical. It was an easy transition into boxing, because he had the speed and strength right away."



Former heavyweight champ Hasim Rahman was instrumental in guiding his nephew Lorenzo Simpson to and through the world of boxing.

The youngster stayed in Las Vegas for a year before returning to Baltimore, where he met his current coach, Calvin Ford.

"(Simpson's) stepfather, Bud, was playing basketball at one of the basketball centers in Baltimore, and I was just starting a gym," said Ford. "He kept telling me he was gonna bring me this kid, and after that we haven't looked back.

Simpson trained with Ford at the Upton Boxing Center, where he was a gym mate of Gervonta Davis, for a couple of years before embarking on a highly successful amateur career, winning several national titles on his way to an incredible record of 286-4.

The 19-year-old would have been a favorite to represent the United States at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. However, Simpson didn't feel the ends justified the means. He returned from the 2018 Pan-American Youth Championships with his mind set on turning professional.

Simpson has since won all five of his pro fights, four inside the distance, and is happy with his progress.

"I think I'm learning a lot each fight; each fight is different. I'm really liking it," he said. "I don't think it's going to take me much longer to get to show my full potential, because I'm getting more comfortable."

Rahman feels his nephew has a very high ceiling as a fighter and can potentially emulate some of the recent greats.

"He's surrounded by good people," said Rahman. "I think he'll stay grounded and stay humble. He can definitely achieve what any middleweight has achieved – Bernard Hopkins, Canelo, GGG – he can reach all of their heights."

Ford agrees: "He can go as far as he wants because (of his) pedigree. His amateur background speaks for itself."

The southpaw has lofty goals for the future and expects to win multiple world titles, starting at 154 pounds.

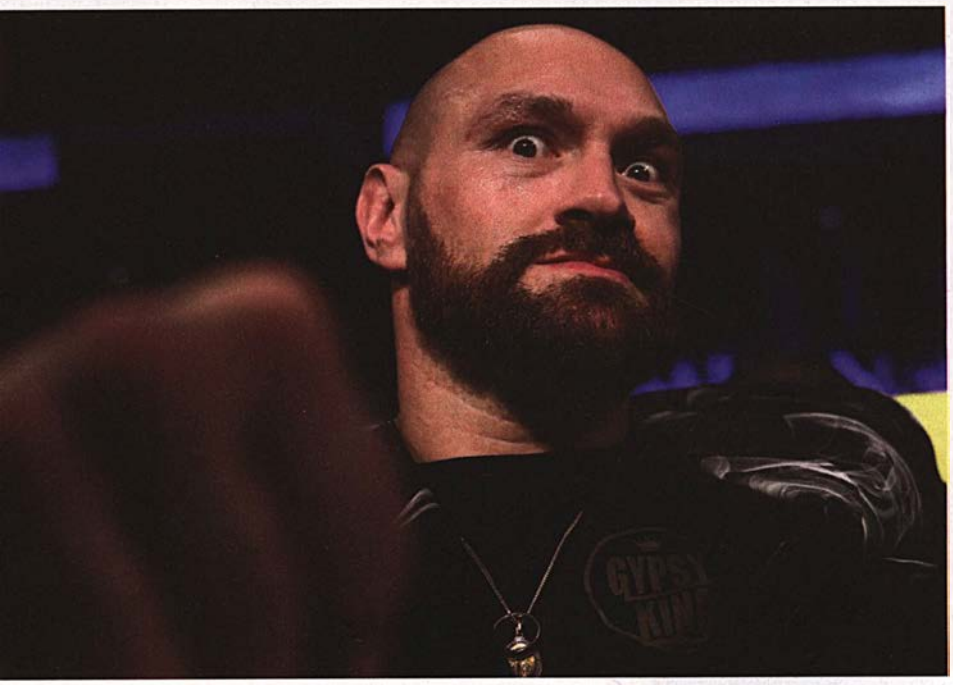
"I want to be a legend," Simpson said. "I want them to say, 'Truck didn't duck nobody. Truck is a student of the game. He made the right business decisions. He made a lot of money.'

"Boxers are known to be dumb, blow their money. I want to beat all the odds. I already beat the odds of a typical Baltimore kid. I'm trying to beat the odds of a boxer and a country."

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER



THE "LINEAL" CHAMPIONSHIP

Tyson Fury (and ESPN) loudly proclaims that he's the lineal champion, but does the heavyweight championship lineage still have merit?

There was a time when the heavyweight championship of the world was the most coveted title in sports. No more. Major sports have true champions. Boxing has world champions, super world champions, interim world champions, world champions in recess and other designations that have reduced the term "champion" to a marketing tool.

It's in vogue now – particularly on ESPN – to talk about Tyson Fury as the "lineal" heavyweight champion of the world. No one that I'm aware of talks about "lineal" champions in any other weight division. But let's put Fury's "lineal" crown in perspective.

Boxing's line of lineal kings began with John L. Sullivan, who annexed the bare-knuckle crown by bludgeoning Paddy Ryan senseless in 1882 and became boxing's first modern gloved champion in 1885. Sullivan was dethroned by James Corbett, who lost to Bob Fitzsimmons, who lost to James Jeffries.

So far, so good.

Then things got messy. In 1905, Jeffries announced his retirement, ending the lineal chain. Marvin Hart was matched against Jack Root and a new king was crowned. But the new king (Hart) lost his first title defense to Tommy Burns, who was separated from the crown by (gasp!) Jack Johnson. In 1910, Jeffries came out of retirement and was beaten to a pulp by Johnson, thus reinstating the "lineal" chain. Things went along lineally from there through Jess Willard, Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney.

Then there was an oops! Tunney retired and stayed retired. No more lineal champion.

In 1930, Max Schmeling was matched against Jack Sharkey and claimed the heavyweight title on a foul. An inglorious procession of champions followed. Sharkey defeated Schmeling in a rematch and was succeeded by Primo Carnera, Max Baer and James Braddock. Then Joe Louis seized the crown and reigned for 12 years.

Louis retired in 1949, ending the House of Louis lineal line. Ezzard Charles beat Jersey Joe Walcott (new line). Louis came out of retirement and lost to Charles (old line restored but now headed by Charles). Charles then lost to Jersey Joe Walcott. Walcott lost to Rocky Marciano. And Marciano retired undefeated in 1956 (end of line).

Next line: Floyd Patterson, Ingemar Johansson, Patterson redux, Sonny Liston, Muhammad Ali (Cassius Clay at the time), Joe Frazier, George Foreman, and the return of Ali (who reestablished

himself as the rightful king). Claims to the throne by Ernie Terrell and Jimmy Ellis during that era can be disregarded. Then Ali lost to Leon Spinks and the age of stripping began (Spinks was stripped of the WBC title for refusing to face Ken Norton, and Ali regained the WBA belt and his lineal champion status by defeating Spinks in a rematch).

In recent decades, boxing has had a head-spinning number of claimants to the heavyweight throne. Various sanctioning body champions have included Gerrie Coetzee, Francesco Damiani, Michael Bentt, Herbie Hide, Bruce Seldon, Henry Akinwande, Sergei Liakhovich, Oleg Maskaev, Ruslan Chagaev, Sultan Ibragimov, Bermane Stiverne, and Charles Martin.

On occasion, a fighter achieves widespread acceptance as the best heavyweight in the world. Larry Holmes, Mike Tyson, Evander Holyfield, Riddick Bowe, Lennox Lewis and Wladimir Klitschko come to mind in that regard. In these instances, the man who beats the man – e.g. Michael Spinks beat Holmes; Buster Douglas beat Tyson – is widely accepted as the new heavyweight king. When Lewis retired as champion after defending his title successfully against Vitali Klitschko in 2003, it marked the end of another line.

Tyson Fury began his so-called "lineal" reign by beating Wladimir Klitschko in 2015. But even by the most ambitious calculations, Klitschko's reign only went as far back as his 2006 victory over Chris Byrd. And having been knocked out in previous title bouts by Corrie Sanders (ending Wladimir's first incarnation as a "champion") and Lamon Brewster (in a subsequent title challenge), Klitschko wasn't recognized as the true heavyweight king until well into his second reign, when he beat Chagaev.

Insofar as it pertains to today's heavyweight champions, the term "lineal" has been rendered meaningless.

★★★

Every now and then, I watch an old boxing movie on television.

Gentleman Jim is a 1942 film starring Errol Flynn as James J. Corbett, the "scientific" fighter who dethroned an aging John L. Sullivan at the Olympic Club in New Orleans in 1892.

Flynn was a huge star in the 1930s and '40s. The Adventures of Robin Hood and Captain Blood were his most famous swashbuckling roles. Gentleman Jim was based loosely on Corbett's autobiography. Variety, whose movie reviews carried considerable weight in those days, called it "a good film" before adding that it was "so far removed from fact that it's ludicrous" and concluding that the film's many fictions "take this picture out of the biographical class and into fantasy."

That's a fair appraisal. The movie is silly and unrealistic. But it's fun.

Ward Bond is engaging as John L. Sullivan, whom Corbett dethrones in the film's climactic battle. Alexis Smith, a Canadian beauty who later enjoyed a successful career on Broadway (she was on the cover of Time magazine during her 1971 Tony Award-winning run in *Follies*) plays Corbett's love interest, Victoria Ware.

The dialogue is vintage Hollywood.

When Corbett meets Sullivan for the first time, he tells The Great John L., "I've seen you around San Francisco a few times, but from a long distance, of course."

"Well," Sullivan responds, "seein' me from a long distance is a smart idea, young fella."

But it's Smith, as Ware, who has the film's best lines. As her romance with Corbett unfolds, she tells him, "A woman doesn't figure things out. She just knows all at once." Later, that evolves to, "I think you like me more than I like you. But it wouldn't surprise me if I loved you more than you love me."

Then, at last, Corbett and Ware kiss.

"I'm no gentleman," Corbett confesses.

"In that case," Ware counters, "I'm no lady."

★★★

A thought for today's troubled times . . .

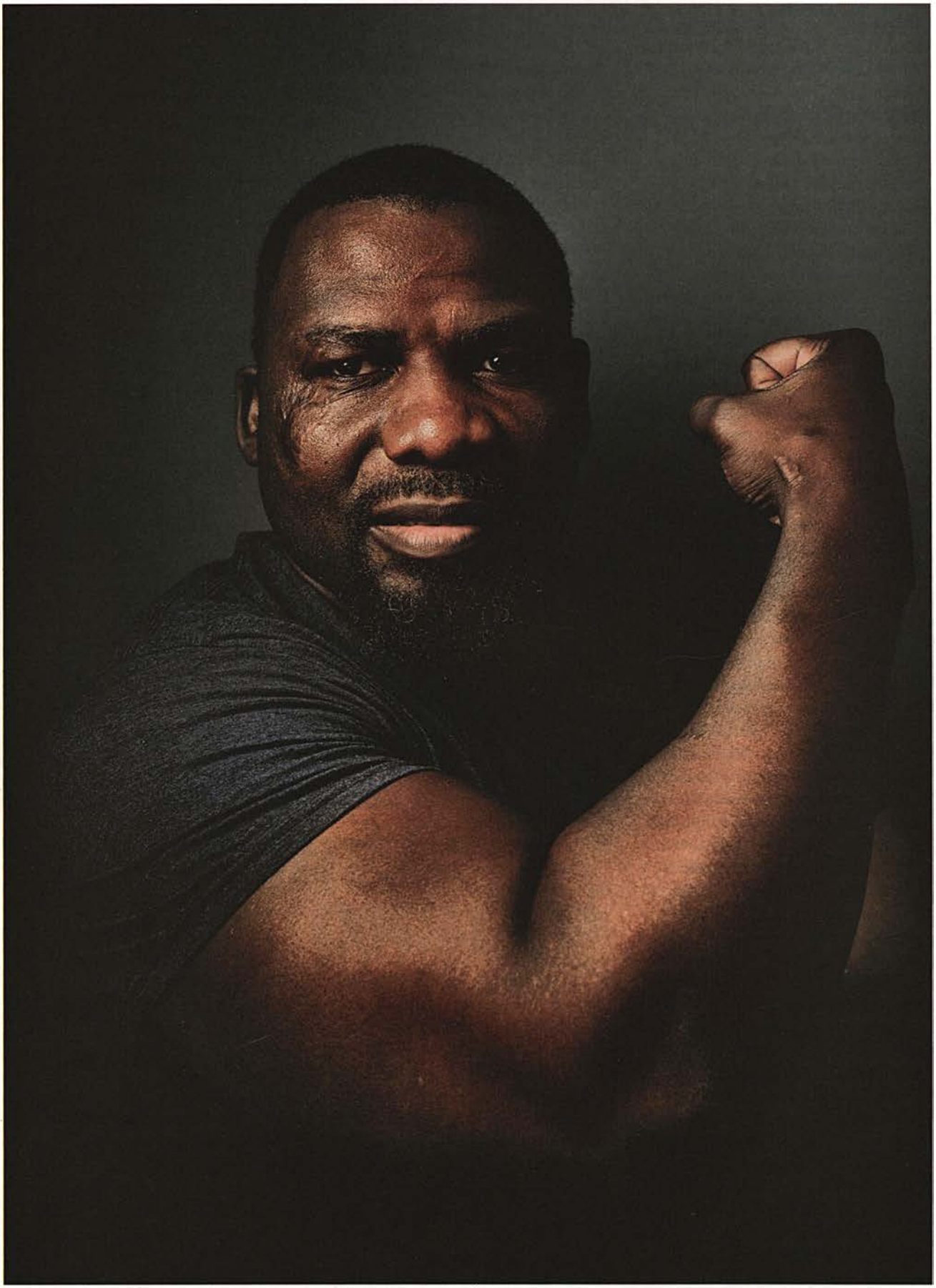
In 1996, Muhammad Ali and I co-authored a short book about bigotry and prejudice entitled HEALING. Thereafter, we were honored by an organization called Givat Haviva at its annual gala dinner.

Givat Haviva is based in Israel. Its mission is to promote tolerance and understanding between Arabs and Jews. As part of its effort, it arranges for Arab and Jewish students to attend classes at each other's schools and at Givat Haviva campuses on an extended basis. These cross-cultural experiences foster the ideals of mutual responsibility, equality, and respect.

Sixteen students from Givat Haviva were among the guests at the dinner. There were eight Arabs and eight Jews – eight young men and eight young women. They were comparably dressed. Guests were encouraged to talk with them. The one prohibition was that we weren't allowed to ask whether an individual student was Arab or Jewish. At the end of the evening, after mingling with the students for several hours, virtually all of the guests had to acknowledge that we couldn't tell which were the Arab students and which were the Jewish students.

There's a message in that for anyone who's listening.

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – A Dangerous Journey: Another Year Inside Boxing – has just been published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.



THE FACE OF BOXING

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **WOJTEK URBANEK**

TEXT BY **THOMAS HAUSER**

HASIM RAHMAN: THE UNDERDOG

Andy Ruiz Jr.'s June 1 knockout of Anthony Joshua brought back memories of the last huge upset in heavyweight championship boxing.

On April 22, 2001, Hasim Rahman journeyed to South Africa to challenge Lennox Lewis for the biggest prize in sports. Lewis was a prohibitive favorite, having beaten Evander Holyfield, Michael Grant, Frans Botha and David Tua in his four most recent outings. Rahman had been knocked out by Tua and also by Oleg Maskaev. But that history had no bearing on the outcome. Hasim knocked Lennox out in the fifth round.

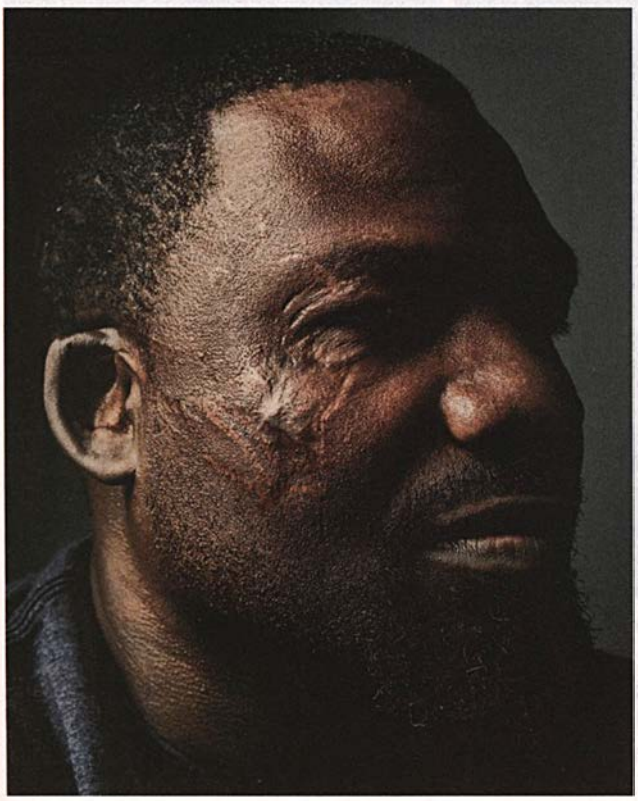
For one shining moment, Rahman was king of the hill. But he couldn't maintain his footing. Seven months later, Lewis won their rematch by knockout. Next, Hasim lost to Evander Holyfield, fought to a draw in a rematch against Tua and was decisioned by John Ruiz.

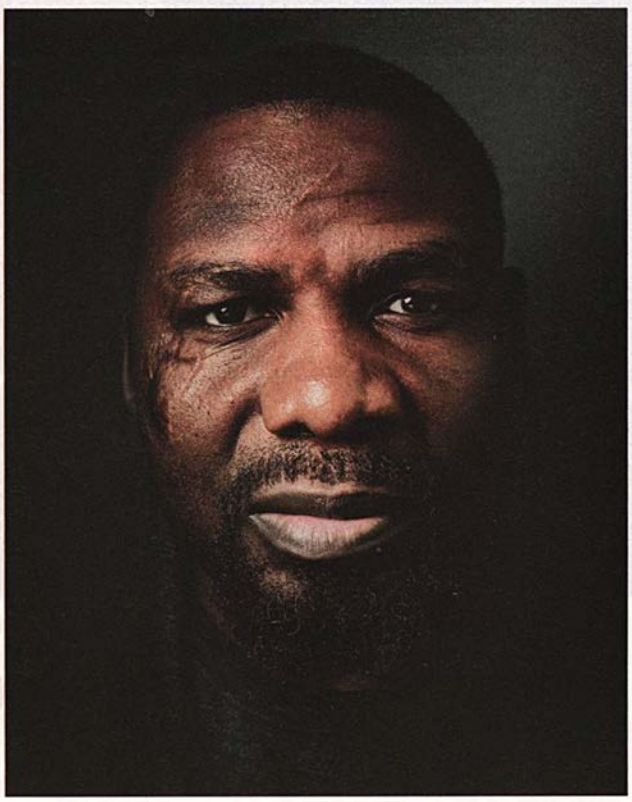
Rahman is now 47 years old. He retired as an active boxer five years ago and trains fighters in Las Vegas.

Recounting the experience of photographing Rahman, Wojtek Urbanek recalls, "We tend to forget sometimes how strong and powerful these men are. Hasim came through the door and suddenly the room seemed smaller than it had been before. He's a big man and he radiates physical strength. In some ways, it felt like I was photographing a boulder. But like all of us, he has vulnerabilities. His face shows the history of what he has been through in the ring and on the streets."

Meanwhile, Ruiz hopes to reign longer than Rahman did. But like Lewis, Joshua is eager for revenge.

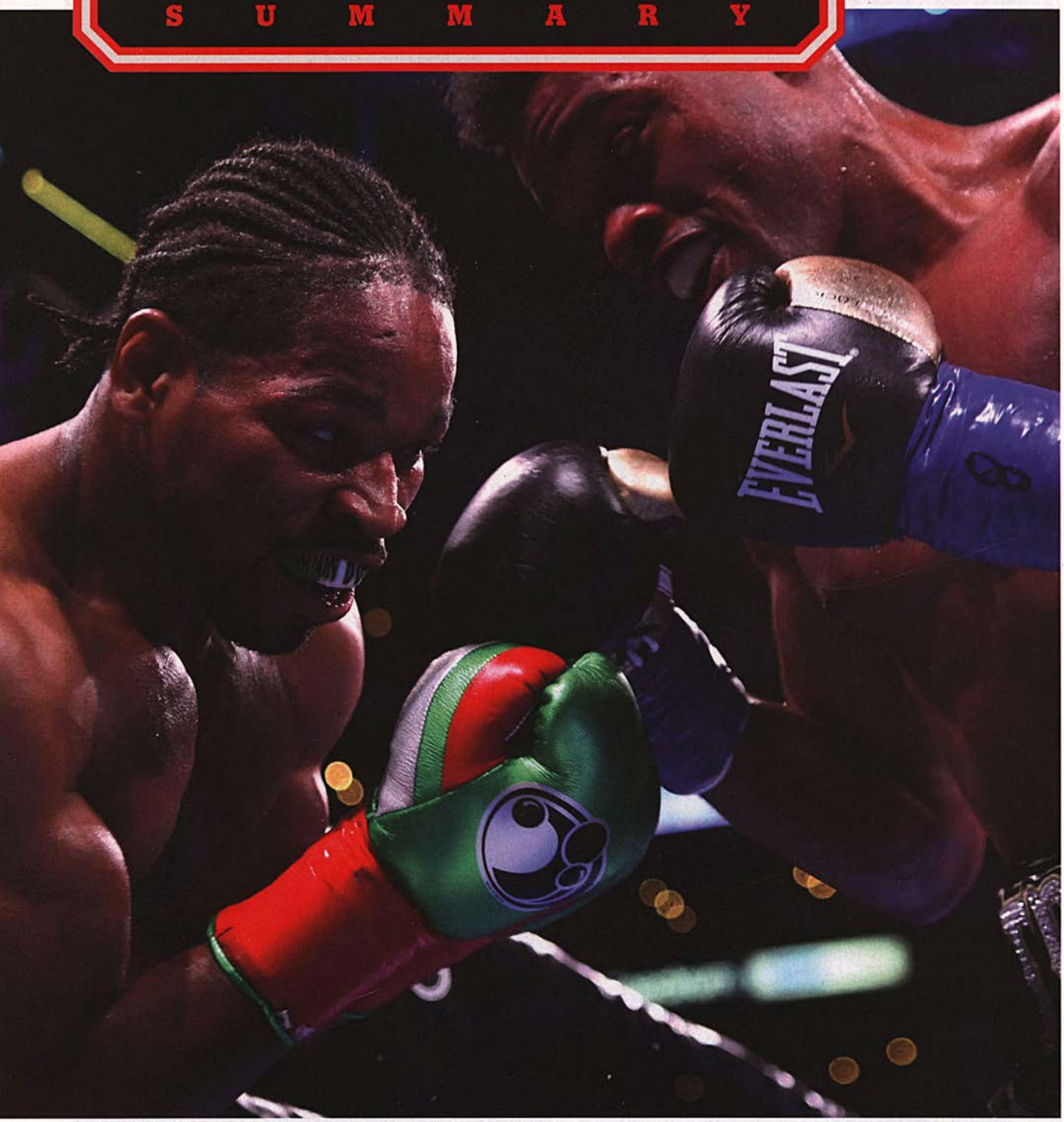
Wojtek Urbanek is based in New York and can be reached at studio@wojtekurbanek.com. Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com.





RATINGS SUMMARY

THE RING RATINGS THROUGH FIGHTS OF OCTOBER 19, 2019



RECENT FIGHT RESULTS AND CHANGES IN THE RING'S DIVISIONAL RANKINGS

BY **BRIAN HARTY**

Shawn Porter (left) gave Errol Spence Jr., The Ring's No. 1-rated welterweight, all he could handle during their thrilling title-unification bout.

POUND FOR POUND

We've all heard that staying calm is the most important thing to remember when in harm's way, but it just isn't realistic for most of us in a lot of situations. Case in point: being attacked by Shawn Porter. Errol Spence Jr. is one of the exceptions, and he was able to maintain his composure even while facing perhaps the most effective version yet of Porter, who is known for a style of pressure-fighting that could be called relentless on a conservative day. Even so, expectations for Spence (No. 6 last month) were at an all-time high going into the fight on September 28 in Los Angeles, so the fact that he *only* eked out a split decision victory led one member of the Ring Ratings Panel to suggest we "pump the brakes" on the Texan's P4P journey and drop him back to No. 9.

This was not a popular idea. Even panelists who had questioned Spence's current ranking rebelled against the thought of demoting him based on the Porter fight, which was close because Porter had a great night, not because Spence was exposed. "I thought Spence was roughed up by a motivated Porter, but at no point did I think Spence was in trouble or lacked control of the fight," as one member summed it up. Spence stayed put.

Two other current members of the list, Gennadiy Golovkin (No. 7) and Aleksandr Usyk (No. 5), also saw action but no consequences rank-wise. Golovkin didn't look great but handled a tough opponent in Sergiy Derevyanchenko; Usyk *did* look great in his heavyweight debut but wasn't tested by Chazz Witherspoon.

The only newcomer to the list was Artur Beterbiev, and that didn't happen without the lengthiest debate of the month. The Russian's 10th-round stoppage of fellow Olympian Oleksandr Gvozdyk (the No. 1-rated light heavyweight) confirmed that he is more than just a tank stuck in forward gear (15 knockouts in 15 fights); he is a tank with eyes that can identify any vulnerable spot on an opponent's body from hairline to waist and arms that can target those areas from adaptable angles with crushing force – stuck in forward gear. With the win, he defended his IBF title for the third time and took Gvozdyk's WBC title along with his perfect record.

The proposed target for Beterbiev's entry was No. 9 or 10, so the hurdles for those not on board were the scorecards (one judge had him down 87-84 and another 86-85 at the time of the stoppage; the third had him up 87-83) and the quality of his record compared to Mikey Garcia (No. 9 last month) and Manny Pacquiao (No. 10). On the first point, those in favor of adding Beterbiev argued that most observers had him winning. As to comparisons with Garcia and Pacquiao, the pro-Beterbiev camp mostly gave the Filipino senator immunity for his recent win over Keith Thurman. Scrutiny thus fell on Garcia and whether his recent accomplishments were better than beating Gvozdyk – all of it muddied by the fact that Garcia's latest accomplishment was purely financial in jumping up two weight classes for a doomed-from-the-start night with Spence.

"Garcia jumps a lot of divisions but doesn't really fight or face top fighters," said one panelist. "And how the (Beterbiev-Gvozdyk) fight was going is irrelevant to me. If he was down 5-4, so what? He won by a definitive knockout, which left no doubt about supremacy."

Another countered: "Taking the whole package into account with Garcia, unlike Gvodzyk (whose best win is Beterbiev), he beat a roll call of champions. Before Spence, no one came close to Garcia on the scorecards or in any other area." The panelist added that any subsequent win over a top five 175-pounder would be Beterbiev's ticket for admission. Another

Gennadiy Golovkin held on to his pound-for-pound ranking and No. 1 middleweight status with a hard-fought spit decision over Sergiy Derevyanchenko.

STEVEN RYAN/GETTY IMAGES

Aleksandr Usyk finally made his heavyweight debut, stopping Chazz Witherspoon after seven rounds, but he did not crack the heavyweight rankings.

cautioned that adding Beterbiev now could be the result of getting carried away by post-fight excitement.

The reasoning behind the final decision to have Beterbiev replace Garcia at No. 9 was described like this: "He took a fellow unbeaten titleholder at the top of his game, broke him up and took him out."

HEAVYWEIGHTS

The next generation continued to impress, with 22-year-old Daniel Dubois finishing Ebenezer Tetteh with two knockdowns in Round 1 and Olympic gold medalist Tony Yoka stopping Michael Wallisch in three to bring his record to 7-0 (6 KOs). Heavy-handed Russian Arslanbek Makhmudov also barreled toward double digits (9-0, 9 KOs) with a third-round knockout of Julian Fernandez. None of them has really been tested yet, but the potential for success is there in all three.

The arrival of former unified cruiserweight champion Usyk was the big story, of course, and his seventh-round stoppage of Witherspoon did nothing to suggest that the Ukrainian will be anything other than a serious player in the division ("In terms of skills, he's the best heavyweight on earth already," said one panelist). It was definitely suggested that he enter the list at No. 10, but he needs to face a higher level of competition before that happens. It was a kick of adrenaline, though, imagining how this smallish heavyweight with pound-for-pound boxing talents might fare against the big guns of the division.

CRUISERWEIGHTS

The Ring championship was vacated with Usyk's move to the glamour division. Murat Gassiev (No. 2 last month), whose last fight was a loss to Usyk in July 2018, was removed for his inactivity, so everyone on the list moved up a notch and a vacancy opened up at No. 10. Several fighters were nominated for the spot, including Alexsei Papin, Constantin Bejenaru, Lawrence Okolie and Aleksei Egorov, but ultimately the nod went to Poland's undefeated Michal Cieslak, whose activity in stoppages of Youri Kalenga and Olanrewaju Durodola within three months of each other stood out.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS

Lenin Castillo (unrated) at least seemed to be enjoying himself as Dmitry Bivol (No. 3 last month) dropped him with a pinpoint right counter in the sixth round, smiling all the way to the canvas. It was vintage Bivol – technically solid and just enough to dominate – but not enough to move up.

Gvozdyk (No. 1 last month) finally succumbed to Beterbiev's onslaught in the 10th round and subsequently dropped to No. 3 in the ratings. Beterbiev, still a relative newbie to the pros with only 15 fights (all of them victories by knockout), went into the fight as No. 4 but ascended to No. 1 afterward.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Anthony Dirrell's corner threw in the towel in the ninth round (which goes on the record as a KO by California rules) to stop the beating he was getting from David Benavidez, who regained the WBC title he'd been stripped of after a positive cocaine test in 2017. Benavidez rose from No. 2 to No. 1, and Dirrell, who fought with a cut pouring blood into his right eye from Round 6 onward, stayed put at No. 4.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS

There were rumors during fight week that Golovkin was sick, and it might've been true the way he looked against Derevyanchenko – a little sluggish, gasping for breath in the corner, not the usual predatory intensity and just generally weaker than we're used to seeing. Or

maybe sick is the new word for old, as the GGG decline-watch continues to be a popular topic. Or maybe Derevyanchenko is a really good fighter. Whatever the reason, Golovkin was getting outworked for much of the fight and hammered with body shots that had clearly tenderized his ribs by the late rounds. He did enough for the judges, though, who gave him the vacant IBF title by scores of 115-112, 115-112 and 114-113, drawing some boos from the crowd. Golovkin stayed put at No. 2 while Derevyanchenko, on the advice of the panel, gained a rank after the loss, moving from No. 6 to No. 5.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS

No changes.

WELTERWEIGHTS

Porter continues to be a fascinating case. He won a world title in 2013 with a mauling, grappling, seemingly football-inspired style that some of us – or at least one of us – found unwatchable. Then he suddenly started boxing, which some who admired the old Porter found strange while the aforementioned some-or-possibly-one of us were/was intrigued. Against Spence, the two versions of Porter settled into some kind of harmony that used the best of each – a head-first, explosive press that makes it difficult for his opponents to time a breath, much less a punch, but also an understanding of how and when to use distance – and it speaks very highly of Porter's intelligence and ongoing quest to evolve and get the most out of what he has. No, it wasn't enough to beat Spence, who is just more naturally gifted, frankly. But it's enough to say that much of the talk after the fight was about the strength of Porter's performance in losing, not the title-unifying effort from Spence, which was just fine. A version of the pound-for-pound "down with Spence" debate also took place here but was rejected, so the order stayed the same with Spence at No. 1 and Porter at No. 5.

JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA

David Benavidez assumed the No. 1 spot at super middleweight with a ninth-round stoppage of veteran Anthony Dirrell.

Kudratillo Abdukakhorov (No. 10 last month) roughed up Luis Collazo (unrated) en route to a 10th-round technical decision in Philadelphia, the American veteran suffering an injured arm and cuts over both eyes before the fight was ended by an accidental headbutt. The cards were comfortably on Abdukakhorov's side and Collazo is always there to win, so the unbeaten Uzbekistani was credited with an extra notch in the ratings for his victory.

On the outskirts, Jaron Ennis inched closer to the list after stopping Demian Fernandez in the third round. From one panelist: "OK, I am ready to step on the Jaron Ennis bandwagon. One win over a decent ex-champ or fellow contender and he is in the top 10."

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS

Mario Barrios (unrated last month) put Batyr Akhmedov on the canvas twice in Los Angeles, which might've been what clinched a 12-round unanimous decision for the still-undefeated Texan. One panel member made an interesting comparison: "I relate Barrios winning to the American Electoral College, where he won because of the 10-point-must rule (because of knockdowns) while the majority of people voted for Akhmedov." Winner of the popular vote or not, Barrios took office at No. 10, displacing Yves Ulysse.

Ivan Baranchyk bounced back from his loss to Josh Taylor in May with a fourth-round stoppage of 18-year veteran Gabriel Bracero. The aggressive Russian looked as energetic as ever, but there's still a lack of

Josh Warrington retained his No. 2 spot in the featherweight rankings with a two-round blowout of Sofiane Takoucht.

sophistication that might hinder his rise to elite status. Accordingly, he stayed put at No. 4.

LIGHTWEIGHTS

No changes.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS

Shavkatdzhon Rakhimov (unrated last month) ventured out of Russia for the first time to face Azinga Fuzile on his home turf in South Africa, with both men sporting 14-0 records. Rakhimov was trailing on the cards, but he surged and came away with the most significant win of his career after chopping Fuzile down with a blistering swarm of punches in the eighth round. The Russian was installed at No. 10 (No. 9-rated Francisco Vargas being dropped to create the space), but something caught on video that looked suspiciously like his corner administering smelling salts could mean this result isn't yet written in stone.

FEATHERWEIGHTS

Josh Warrington stayed put at No. 2 with a ruthless second-round stoppage of French veteran Sofiane Takoucht to retain his IBF title. Warrington is 30-0 but only has seven knockouts – and this was the quickest one of his career by two rounds – so the manner of his win was refreshingly out of character for the Englishman and immediately makes any of the unification possibilities more dramatic.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS

No changes.

BANTAMWEIGHTS

No changes.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS

No changes.

FLYWEIGHTS

Andrew Selby (No. 6 last month) was knocked down twice in an eight-rounder with unrated Fadhili Majiha – somebody who probably shouldn't be giving him so much trouble – but won a decision. There was a suggestion on the panel to drop Selby a spot, but he currently sits above Cristofer Rosales, whom he beat handily in 2017, so the order remained for now.

Junto Nakatani rose from No. 10 to No. 9 after a dominant sixth-round stoppage of former titleholder Milan Melindo (rated No. 7 at 108 pounds last month), who has now lost three tough fights in a row.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS

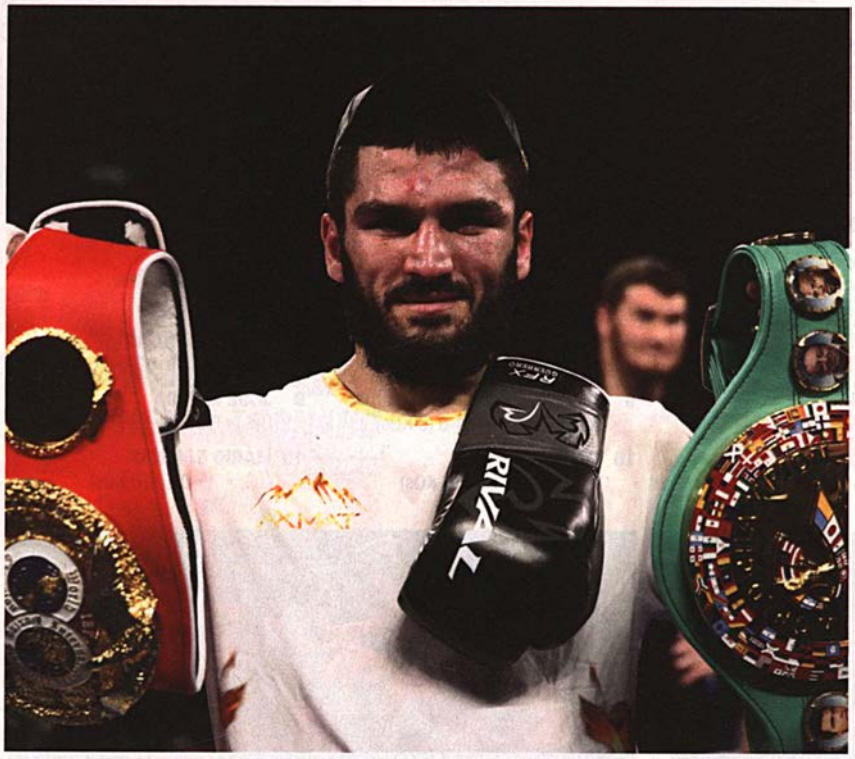
Hiroto Kyoguchi successfully defended his Ring and WBA titles with a unanimous decision over countryman Tetsuya Hisada, who held on to his spot at No. 9 with his respectable effort. With Melindo moving up to 112, though, the bottom three moved up and No. 10 was filled by Mexico's Daniel Valladares.

STRAWWEIGHTS

No changes.

RATINGS

THE RING RATINGS THROUGH FIGHTS OF OCT. 19, 2019



Artur Beterbiev unified two light heavyweight titles and cracked the pound-for-pound rankings with his impressive KO of Oleksandr Gvozdyk.

1 VASILIY LOMACHENKO
Ukraine • 14-1-0 (10 KOs)

2 TERENCE CRAWFORD
U.S. • 35-0-0 (26 KOs)

3 CANELO ALVAREZ
Mexico • 52-1-2 (35 KOs)

4 NAOYA INOUE
Japan • 18-0-0 (16 KOs)

5 ALEKSANDR USYK
Ukraine • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)

6 ERROL SPENCE JR.
U.S. • 26-0-0 (21 KOs)

7 GENNADIY GOLOVKIN
Kazakhstan • 40-1-1 (35 KOs)

8 JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
Mexico • 40-3-0 (27 KOs)

9 ARTUR BETERBIEV
Russia • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)

10 MANNY PACQUIAO
Philippines • 62-7-2 (39 KOs)

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C (VACANT)

1 TYSON FURY
U.K. • 29-0-1 (20 KOs)

2 DEONTAY WILDER
U.S. • 41-0-1 (40 KOs)

3 ANDY RUIZ JR.
U.S. • 33-1-0 (22 KOs)

4 ANTHONY JOSHUA
U.K. • 22-1-0 (21 KOs)

5 DILLIAN WHYTE
U.K. • 26-1-0 (18 KOs)

6 LUIS ORTIZ
Cuba • 31-1-0 (26 KOs)

7 ALEXANDER POVETKIN
Russia • 35-2-0 (24 KOs)

8 JOSEPH PARKER
New Zealand • 26-2-0 (20 KOs)

9 ADAM KOWNACKI
U.S. • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)

10 KUBRAT PULEV
Bulgaria • 27-1-0 (14 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 MAIRIS BRIEDIS
Latvia • 26-1-0 (19 KOs)

2 YUNIER DORTICOS
Cuba • 24-1-0 (22 KOs)

3 KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI
Poland • 31-2-0 (19 KOs)

4 ILUNGA MAKABU
Congo • 26-2-0 (24 KOs)

5 KEVIN LERENA
S. Africa • 24-1-0 (11 KOs)

6 ANDREW TABITI
U.S. • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)

7 ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN
France • 24-0-0 (16 KOs)

8 LAWRENCE OKOLIE
U.K. • 13-0-0 (10 KOs)

9 YVES NGABU
Belgium • 20-0-0 (14 KOs)

10 MICHAL CIESLAK
Poland • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 ARTUR BETERBIEV
Russia • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)

2 SERGEY KOVALEV
Russia • 34-3-1 (29 KOs)

3 OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK
Ukraine • 17-1-0 (14 KOs)

4 DMITRY BIVOL
Russia • 17-0-0 (11 KOs)

5 ELEIDER ALVAREZ
Colombia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)

6 BADOU JACK
Sweden • 22-2-3 (13 KOs)

7 JEAN PASCAL
Canada • 34-6-1 (20 KOs)

8 JESSE HART
U.S. • 26-2-0 (21 KOs)

9 MARCUS BROWNE
U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)

10 SULLIVAN BARRERA
Cuba • 22-3-0 (14 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C CALLUM SMITH
U.K. • 26-0-0 (19 KOs)

1 DAVID BENAVIDEZ
U.S. • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)

2 GILBERTO RAMIREZ
Mexico • 40-0-0 (26 KOs)

3 CALEB PLANT
U.S. • 19-0-0 (11 KOs)

4 ANTHONY DIRRELL
U.S. • 33-2-1 (24 KOs)

5 CANELO ALVAREZ
Mexico • 52-1-2 (35 KOs)

6 CHRIS EUBANK JR.
U.K. • 28-2-0 (21 KOs)

7 JOSE UZCATEGUI
Venezuela • 28-3-0 (23 KOs)

8 CALEB TRUAX
U.S. • 30-4-2 (19 KOs)

9 BILLY JOE SAUNDERS
U.K. • 28-0-0 (13 KOs)

10 AVNI YILDIRIM
Turkey • 21-2-0 (12 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of October 19, 2019

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- **C CANELO ALVAREZ** Mexico • 52-1-2 (35 KOs)
- **1 GENNADIY GOLOVKIN** Kaz. • 40-1-1 (35 KOs)
- **2 DANIEL JACOBS** U.S. • 35-3-0 (29 KOs)
- **3 DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** U.S. • 28-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **4 JERMALL CHARLO** U.S. • 29-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **5 SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO** Ukraine • 13-2-0 (10 KOs)
- **6 RYOTA MURATA** Japan • 15-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **7 DAVID LEMIEUX** Canada • 40-4-0 (34 KOs)
- **8 KAMIL SZEREMETA** Poland • 21-0-0 (5 KOs)
- **9 MACIEJ SULECKI** Poland • 28-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **10 ROB BRANT** U.S. • 25-2-0 (17 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 JULIAN WILLIAMS** U.S. • 27-1-1 (16 KOs)
- **2 JARRETT HURD** U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **3 ERISLANDY LARA** Cuba • 26-3-3 (15 KOs)
- **4 JAIME MUNGUIA** Mexico • 34-0-0 (27 KOs)
- **5 BRIAN CASTANO** Argentina • 15-0-1 (11 KOs)
- **6 TONY HARRISON** U.S. • 28-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **7 JERMELL CHARLO** U.S. • 32-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **8 MICHEL SORO** France • 34-2-1 (23 KOs)
- **9 ERICKSON LUBIN** U.S. • 21-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **10 KELL BROOK** U.K. • 38-2-0 (26 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 ERROL SPENCE JR.** U.S. • 26-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **2 TERENCE CRAWFORD** U.S. • 35-0-0 (26 KOs)
- **3 MANNY PACQUIAO** Phil. • 62-7-2 (39 KOs)
- **4 KEITH THURMAN** U.S. • 29-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **5 SHAWN PORTER** U.S. • 30-3-1 (17 KOs)
- **6 DANNY GARCIA** U.S. • 35-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **7 YORDENIS UGAS** Cuba • 24-4-0 (11 KOs)
- **8 EGIDIJUS KAVALIAUSKAS** Lithuania • 21-0-1 (17 KOs)
- **9 KUDRATILLO ABDUKAKHOROV** Uzbekistan • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **10 SERGEY LIPINETS** Russia • 16-1-0 (12 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 REGIS PROGRAIS** U.S. • 24-0-0 (20 KOs)
- **2 JOSH TAYLOR** U.K. • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **3 JOSE RAMIREZ** U.S. • 25-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **4 IVAN BARANCHYK** Russia • 20-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **5 VIKTOR POSTOL** Ukraine • 31-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **6 KIRYL RELIKH** Belarus • 23-3-0 (19 KOs)
- **7 MAURICE HOOKER** U.S. • 26-1-3 (17 KOs)
- **8 SUBRIEL MATIAS** Puerto Rico • 14-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **9 JOSE ZEPEDA** U.S. • 31-2-0 (25 KOs)
- **10 MARIO BARRIOS** U.S. • 25-0-0 (16 KOs)

Anthony Dirrell (right) fought valiantly enough against David Benavidez to hold on to his No. 4 super middleweight ranking.

Sergiy Derevyanchenko (right) performed so well in his loss to Gennadiy Golovkin that he advanced one spot in the middleweight rankings.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- **C VASILIY LOMACHENKO** Ukraine • 14-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **1 RICHARD COMMEY** Ghana • 29-2-0 (26 KOs)
- **2 DEVIN HANEY** U.S. • 23-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **3 TEOFIMO LOPEZ** U.S. • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **4 LUKE CAMPBELL** U.K. • 20-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **5 ROBERT EASTER** U.S. • 21-1-1 (14 KOs)
- **6 JAVIER FORTUNA** Dom. Rep. • 34-2-1 (23 KOs)
- **7 EMMANUEL TAGOE** Ghana • 31-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **8 ANTHONY CROLLA** U.K. • 34-7-3 (13 KOs)
- **9 RYAN GARCIA** U.S. • 18-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **10 RANCES BARTHELEMY** Cuba • 27-1-1 (14 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 MIGUEL BERCHELT** Mexico • 36-1-0 (32 KOs)
- **2 GERVONTA DAVIS** U.S. • 22-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **3 TEVIN FARMER** U.S. • 30-4-1 (6 KOs)
- **4 ANDREW CANCIO** U.S. • 21-4-2 (16 KOs)
- **5 JAMEL HERRING** U.S. • 20-2-0 (10 KOs)
- **6 JOSEPH DIAZ JR.** U.S. • 30-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **7 MASAYUKI ITO** Japan • 26-2-1 (14 KOs)
- **8 MIGUEL ROMAN** Mexico • 62-13-0 (47 KOs)
- **9 RENE ALVARADO** Nicaragua • 31-8-0 (20 KOs)
- **10 SHAVKATDZHON RAKHIMOV** Russia • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 LEO SANTA CRUZ** U.S. • 36-1-1 (19 KOs)
- **2 JOSH WARRINGTON** U.K. • 30-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **3 GARY RUSSELL JR.** U.S. • 30-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **4 OSCAR VALDEZ** Mexico • 26-0-0 (20 KOs)
- **5 CARL FRAMPTON** U.K. • 26-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **6 XU CAN** China • 17-2-0 (3 KOs)
- **7 SHAKUR STEVENSON** U.S. • 12-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **8 TUGSTSOGT NYAMBAYAR** Mongolia • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **9 KID GALAHAD** U.K. • 26-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **10 JOET GONZALEZ** U.S. • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 DANIEL ROMAN** U.S. • 27-2-1 (10 KOs)
- **2 REY VARGAS** Mexico • 34-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3 EMANUEL NAVARRETE** Mexico • 29-1-0 (25 KOs)
- **4 GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX** Cuba • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **5 TJ DOHENY** Australia • 22-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **6 RYOSUKE IWASA** Japan • 26-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **7 BRANDON FIGUEROA** U.S. • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **8 TOMOKI KAMEDA** Japan • 36-3-0 (20 KOs)
- **9 ISAAC DOGBOE** Ghana • 20-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **10 AZAT HOVHANNISYAN** Armenia • 18-3-0 (15 KOs)

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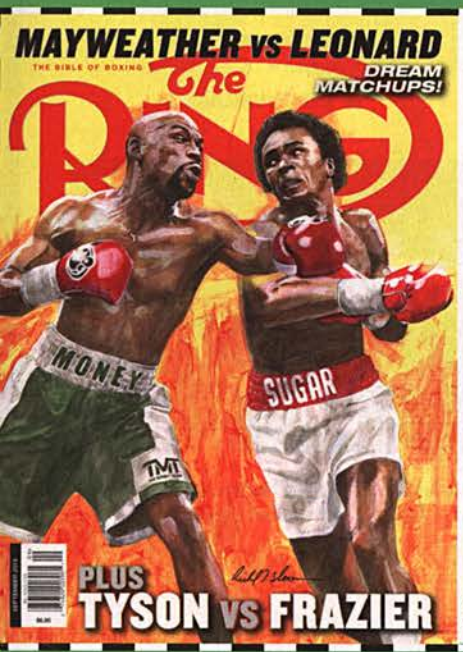

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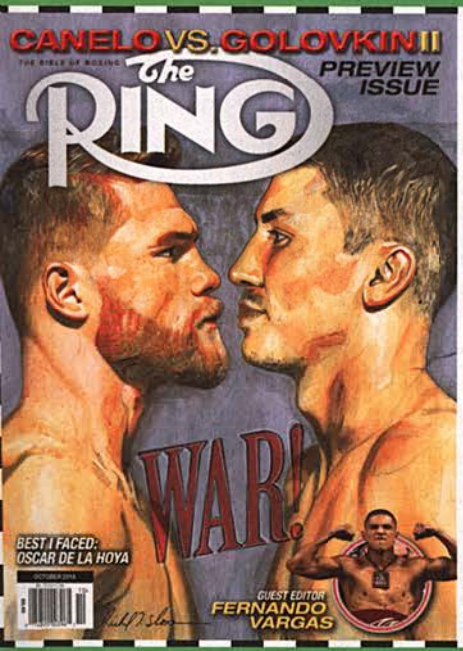

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RATINGS

Through fights of October 19, 2019

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- **C** **NAOYA INOUE** Japan • 18-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **1** **LUIS NERY** Mexico • 30-0-0 (24 KOs)
- **2** **ZOLANI TETE** S. Africa • 28-3-0 (21 KOs)
- **3** **NONITO DONAIRE** Phil. • 40-5-0 (26 KOs)
- **4** **NORDINE OUBAALI** France • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ** P.R. • 19-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **6** **JASON MOLONEY** Australia • 19-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **7** **TAKUMA INOUE** Japan • 13-0-0 (3 KOs)
- **8** **CARLOS CUADRAS** Mexico • 39-3-1 (27 KOs)
- **9** **JOSHUA GREER** U.S. • 21-1-1 (12 KOs)
- **10** **JOHN RIEL CASIMERO** Philippines • 28-4–0 (19 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

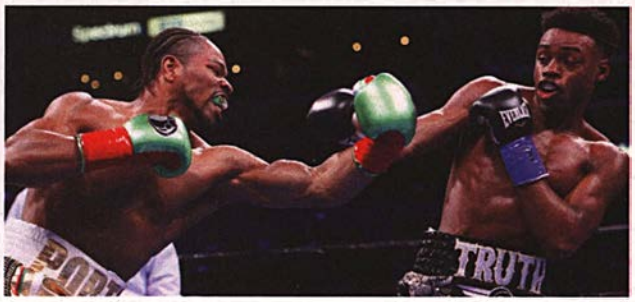
- **C** **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** Mexico • 40-3-0 (27 KOs)
- **1** **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI** Thailand • 47-5-1 (41 KOs)
- **2** **DONNIE NIETES** Phil. • 42-1-5 (23 KOs)
- **3** **KAZUTO IOKA** Japan • 24-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **4** **KHALID YAFAI** U.K. • 26-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **5** **JERWIN ANCAJAS** Phil. • 31-1-2 (21 KOs)
- **6** **ROMAN GONZALEZ** Nicaragua • 47-2-0 (39 KOs)
- **7** **ANDREW MOLONEY** Australia • 20-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **8** **FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.** Mexico • 31-4-1 (22 KOs)
- **9** **JEYVIER CINTRON** P.R. • 11-0-0 (5 KOs)
- **10** **ALEJANDRO BARRIOS** Mexico • 20-2-5 (10 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **KOSEI TANAKA** Japan • 14-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **2** **MORUTI MTHALANE** S. Africa • 38-2-0 (25 KOs)
- **3** **ARTEM DALAKIAN** Ukraine • 19-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **4** **JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** Mexico • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **5** **CHARLIE EDWARDS** U.K. • 15-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **6** **ANDREW SELBY** U.K. • 13-1-0 (7 KOs)
- **7** **CRISTOFER ROSALES** Nicaragua • 29-4-0 (20 KOs)
- **8** **MASAYUKI KURODA** Japan • 30-8-3 (16 KOs)
- **9** **JUNTO NAKATANI** Japan • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **10** **RYOICHI TAGUCHI** Japan • 27-4-2 (12 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- **C** **HIROTO KYOGUCHI** Japan • 14-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **1** **KEN SHIRO** Japan • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **2** **HEKKIE BUDLER** S. Africa • 32-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **3** **CARLOS CANIZALES** Venezuela • 22-0-1 (17 KOs)
- **4** **FELIX ALVARADO** Nicaragua • 35-2-0 (30 KOs)
- **5** **ELWIN SOTO** Mexico • 15-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **6** **ANGEL ACOSTA** P.R. • 20-2-0 (20 KOs)
- **7** **EDWARD HENO** Phil. • 14-0-5 (5 KOs)
- **8** **TETSUYA HISADA** Japan • 34-10-2 (20 KOs)
- **9** **SHO KIMURA** Japan • 18-3-2 (11 KOs)
- **10** **DANIEL VALLADARES** Mexico • 21-1-0 (13 KOs)



Shawn Porter did not drop in the welterweight rankings following his split-decision loss to Errol Spence Jr.

Former titleholder Ivan Baranchyk (left) kept his No. 4 junior welterweight ranking with a stoppage of Gabriel Bracero.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** Thailand • 20-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **2** **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN** Thailand • 53-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **3** **WILFREDO MENDEZ** Puerto Rico • 14-1-0 (5 KOs)
- **4** **BYRON ROJAS** Nicaragua • 27-4-3 (11 KOs)
- **5** **SIMPIWE KONKCO** S. Africa • 19-5-0 (7 KOs)
- **6** **DEEJAY KRIEL** S. Africa • 15-1-1 (7 KOs)
- **7** **VIC SALUDAR** Phil. • 19-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **8** **JOSE ARGUMEDO** Mexico • 23-4-1 (14 KOs)
- **9** **PEDRO TADURAN** Phil. • 14-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **10** **CARLOS LICONA** U.S. • 15-1-0 (2 KOs)

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Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

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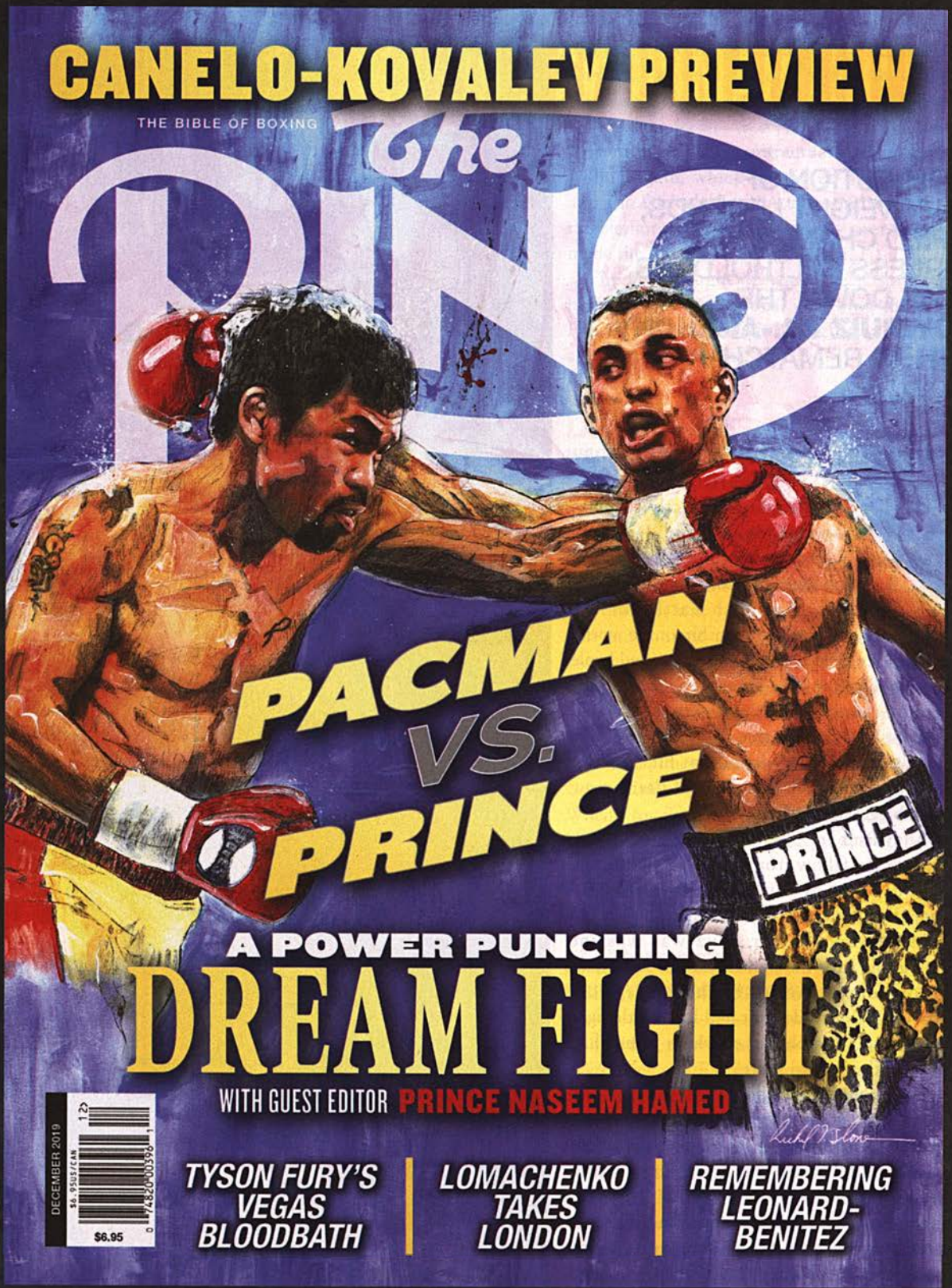

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RUIZ VS. JOSHUA II — THE CHAMPIONS' CORNER

A COLLECTION OF HEAVYWEIGHT LEGENDS, UNIFIED CHAMPS AND FEARLESS BELTHOLDERS BREAK DOWN THE **ANDY RUIZ JR.-ANTHONY JOSHUA** REMATCH

By **The Ring staff**

It was all going perfectly to plan. Anthony Joshua and Deontay Wilder would eliminate as many opponents as possible in the lead-up to their own battle for the undisputed heavyweight championship of the world. When the smoke cleared, only one man would rule the glamour division. The outcome would define the respective careers of both participants. It would be the richest heavyweight title fight ever. Yes, with every Joshua and Wilder victim that hit the floor concussed and bloodied, this clash of titans grew bigger and bigger and bigger.

Enter Andy Ruiz Jr.

This charming fellow from Imperial, California, strolled into the Joshua sweepstakes as a replacement opponent for PED-loaded behemoth Jarrell Miller. Like Miller, Ruiz was was the underdog going into the fight at Madison Square Garden on June 1. After all, the 30-year-old contender of Mexican descent had lost a title fight to New Zealander Joseph Parker, whom Joshua had outpointed with room to spare.

Look out for that curveball.

On fight night, Ruiz morphed from rotund and happy-go-lucky no-hoper to marauding superfight destroyer. Joshua became the first man to knock him off his feet, but Ruiz returned fire with interest, dropping the colossal Londoner four times en route to a spectacular seventh-round stoppage victory. If you had money on that result, then spend as much time as possible at the racetrack. You'll be a millionaire in no time.

As always with massive upsets, there was an element of denial. Excuses for Joshua's capitulation came hard and fast, although it must be said that none of them came directly from the fighter himself. Rumors swirled that Joshua was unsettled away from home. There was talk that he was knocked out in sparring by Philly journeyman Joey Dawejko days prior to the Ruiz bout. Maybe he'd suffered a panic attack. In the end, the only stories we didn't have were loose ropes or horseshoes in Ruiz's gloves.

Well, you needn't worry; the sequel is almost here. Not only was Ruiz contractually obligated to face Joshua again, which he will do at a new outdoor arena in Diriyah, Saudi Arabia, on December 7, but the plethora of questions hanging over the first fight made the direct rematch a natural.

The Ring caught up with a selection of former heavyweight champions, including three Hall of Famers, to gather their thoughts and predictions ahead of Ruiz-Joshua 2.

★★★

LARRY HOLMES

WBC TITLEHOLDER (1978-83), RING CHAMPION (1980-85), IBF TITLEHOLDER (1983-85)

"I'm gonna go with Joshua, but he needs to work on his jab and his combinations to win the fight. If he can come back and win, that's good for his résumé, but the best way to do it is not lose; just win and win and win and win. I started boxing in 1973 and didn't lose a fight until 1985. What makes a fighter great is the opponents that he beats; that's what will give Joshua the recognition. It's no use just being known in the U.K. or around the corner. He's got to get himself known all over the world. When I fought Gerry Cooney, everybody knew Gerry Cooney. When I fought Ken Norton, everybody knew Kenny Norton. When I fought these guys, everybody knew who the winner was."

PREDICTION: JOSHUA

★★★

LAMON BREWSTER

WBO TITLEHOLDER 2004-06

"I heard rumors that Joshua got knocked down in sparring, so that put doubt in his mind. He was already scheduled to fight 'Big Baby' Miller, so now you have to shift gears, because maybe you trained to avoid a right hand or throw a right hand, but now, with this new opponent, you don't have time to prepare. Maybe Joshua was a little over confident. Success is won inside the body and inside the mind. When I fought Wladimir (Klitschko), it didn't matter who I was fighting. The only thing that mattered was I knew I could do it, and I did. If you look at Joshua, he's a strong, athletic, skilled fighter, but he's fighting a guy who you could say, 'He's not in shape.' What Joshua did was stupid; you don't bang with a

Boxing fans and media aren't the only ones split over who will win the Ruiz-Joshua rematch. Former heavyweight titleholders find the matchup fascinating.

banger. Joshua is more of a boxer-puncher, and you can't bang with those dudes – Mexican pride, balls to the wall. Ruiz has been training his whole life to fight the fight you gave him. You have put yourself in a very bad spot. I know what it's like to lose a title. His biggest fight is not going to be Andy Ruiz, it's Anthony Joshua. Not to say Joshua can't win, because he's a big puncher, I just think psychologically everything is turning toward Ruiz. I think Joshua should have taken a tune-up to get his confidence back and fight just as good as before. I think Ruiz will stop Joshua."

PREDICTION: RUIZ

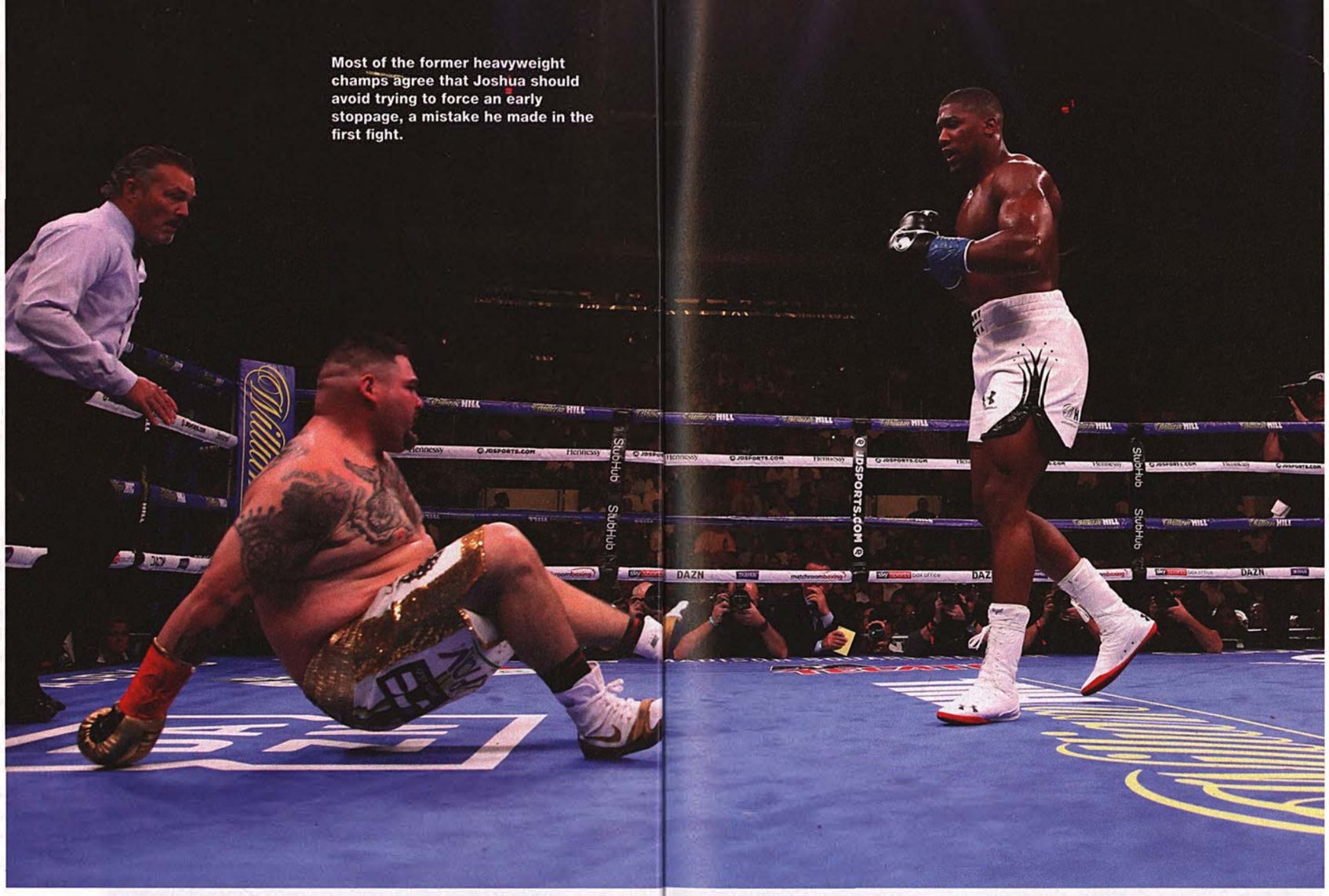
★ ★ ★

GEORGE FOREMAN

UNDISPUTED CHAMPION (1973-74), WBA/IBF CHAMPION (1994-95)

"I think it's gonna be a good match. Ruiz has always been a good fighter, and to judge him on the way he looks is very naïve. And that's a nice way to put it. The man is a good fighter, and he's already shown that. I listened to everyone telling me how I was going to beat an old Muhammad Ali easily, and I fell for it too. After four rounds, I realized that I wasn't mentally prepared for that fight, and the same thing happened when Joshua fought Ruiz. I put some advice out there for Anthony Joshua, but he's got his own camp, and he's put together a great career so far. I think he can get the title back, and he doesn't need my help. What he could do is look at some films of my fights against opponents of a similar size. Joshua won't be complacent this time; he'll have his team working on this from every angle. In the first fight, he just didn't know what to do. But with those long arms, he should be able to pull this one out on a decision. A rejuvenated AJ can get the title back easily, because he has the talent, the height and the speed."

PREDICTION: JOSHUA



Most of the former heavyweight champs agree that Joshua should avoid trying to force an early stoppage, a mistake he made in the first fight.

NICK POTTS

EVANDER HOLYFIELD

UNDISPUTED CHAMPION (1990-92) WBA/IBF CHAMPION (1993-94), WBA TITLEHOLDER (1996-99, 2000-01), IBF TITLEHOLDER (1997-99)

"Anthony Joshua has something to prove. He lost his focus for a minute, and this happened. This will show if he can make adjustments and come back. Life's about adjustments; the person who makes the adjustments shows you they're teachable, and this is what the sport is all about. Joshua has to use his size. He showed he can knock the guy down, but is he in good enough shape to do it? It's obvious he wasn't the first time. He knocked the guy down, but why didn't he finish him? The guy fought back, and maybe Anthony wasn't used to people putting pressure on him. He's used to putting pressure on everybody else. This guy was always in his face and made him fight at a pace he wasn't accustomed to. When I fought (Mike) Tyson, we had big punchers coming in (to training camp) and they threw them big bombs at me, and I had to negotiate them big bombs. You've got two, three people doing that, you're practicing for the task. I put myself in a position where when Tyson attacked, I'm accustomed to how to respond. I wouldn't put my money on either one, because both are capable of winning. If one makes a mistake, the other can take them out at any given time. The thing with Ruiz is to show that (the first fight) was no mistake. Both have something to prove. It's a pick 'em fight. I just want to see a great fight."

PREDICTION: UNDECIDED

★ ★ ★

ROY JONES

WBA TITLEHOLDER (2003-04)

"I think Joshua underestimated Andy the first fight, because Andy's a better boxer than people give him credit for. This time it's about who makes the better adjustments; whoever makes the better adjustments should win the pick 'em fight. Now Joshua knows exactly what Ruiz is, whereas Andy Ruiz always knew what Joshua was. This time we can expect to see the best Joshua possible. This time, I really think it's a 50-50 fight. I'm not really sure (who wins). It's all about who makes the proper adjustments."

PREDICTION: UNDECIDED

★ ★ ★

RAY MERCER

WBO TITLEHOLDER 1991

"I think Anthony Joshua took Ruiz for granted and he got in there, got hit on the temple and couldn't recover. I was a sort of gatekeeper – you beat me and you got a title shot. It doesn't seem fair, but that's the way it is. I would say if you're the underdog, you sort of have an advantage. I was the underdog against Tommy Morrison, and I was champion. I only got paid $50,000 more than he did, and that motivated me in the gym. The army definitely made me, and coach Kenny Adams was a great inspiration. He's a great trainer, and he's going into the Hall of Fame. I think Joshua can and will win the fight; I think he'll show it this time. I think Ruiz gets knocked out. Joshua's the better fighter. Anthony's going to get in there and not take Ruiz for granted, and he's going to come in the best shape of his life."

PREDICTION: JOSHUA

★ ★ ★

MICHAEL MOORER

WBO TITLEHOLDER (1992-93), WBA/IBF CHAMPION (1994), IBF TITLEHOLDER (1996-97)

"When I was out in California with Freddie Roach in 2008, Andy Ruiz was always in the gym, quiet, did everything he was supposed to do, sparred all the heavyweights that were out there. I never sparred him, but I had told two of my buddies to take Ruiz on the knockout, and no one took the bet 'cause they thought I was crazy. I knew Ruiz was gonna win because of the experience he got in the gym; he got a lot of ring generalship from that. People are underestimating him because of his body size, but he will crack the shit out of you and hurt you. I don't know; I'm not in (Joshua's) mind. But for him to say (Lennox Lewis is a clown following Lewis' analysis of Joshua-Ruiz I), a former undisputed heavyweight champion? (Lewis) knows the business, and Joshua, a younger guy, really doesn't understand it. Lennox saying what he wanted to say to him should make him open his eyes and ears to say, 'Hey, you've got to go in there and do it the right way. Don't half-ass!' The rematch is going to be the same. The only thing: I don't want anybody to put anything in (Ruiz's) food to try to make him weak, so he has to be cautious on stuff like that. I'm not saying they will. I think Ruiz will do the same thing he did to Joshua the first time: knock him out. I'm thinking probably eight or nine."

PREDICTION: RUIZ

Some of the former champs believe Joshua lacks the chin, skill and/or ability to relax that's necessary for him to withstand Ruiz's two-fisted fury.

JOSEPH PARKER
WBO TITLEHOLDER (2016-18)

"I said before the fight that Ruiz had the ability to cause an upset, but I think the way that he did it was a surprise to everyone. Nobody expected him to knock Joshua down four times and get the stoppage. But my team – (trainer) Kevin (Barry) and everyone else – knew that Ruiz had the ability to cause the upset, because of our experience fighting against him. Ruiz is a great body-puncher, and in a few of the rounds he was switching from head to body, throwing more punches and outboxing Joshua. There was talk that Joshua may have underestimated Ruiz because he was a replacement opponent, but Joshua is a professional. You should approach any fight seriously, and the way I see it, on that day, the better man won. Going into the rematch, Joshua seems to have changed his overall approach; he's doing a lot more movement drills and he's looking a lot trimmer. The thing about the second fight is they're going to be a lot more familiar with each other. Ruiz will put on a lot of pressure, because he knows that's something that Joshua doesn't like. If I need to come off the fence ... I picked Joshua the first time, and providing he boxes Ruiz and keeps him at range, he can win a decision."

PREDICTION: JOSHUA

★ ★ ★

HASIM RAHMAN
WBC/IBF CHAMPION (2001), WBC TITLEHOLDER (2005-06)

"I actually thought Joshua would win the first fight, but I knew Andy Ruiz is a tough, tough guy. I thought it would be a tough fight but Joshua would win a decision. He went in there and tried to bang, tried to get Ruiz out of there and got caught. For me, and I'm sure for Andy, the whole world can think you're an underdog, but as long as you don't believe you're the underdog and you go in there with the purpose of winning the heavyweight championship, if you keep that out in front, you can go out there and handle your business. Ruiz had came off a fight three, four weeks before he got the notice for that fight and went out there and performed like a champ. 'Underdog' is just a state of mind. 'Champion' is a state of mind. Andy Ruiz had that championship state of mind. I think with all of Anthony Joshua's gifts, he can make it an extremely ugly fight, staying away almost like one of the Klitschkos and make it a boring fight and win a decision. He can get an ugly win, or he can get a pretty loss if he tries to bang with Ruiz. For me, if I'm Anthony Joshua, I'm going to look bad this fight and look good in the next one, but I'm going to win. I'm going to use the distance and space to make sure he doesn't get close enough to land bombs on me. Joshua unanimous decision in a boring fight. If Joshua has revenge on his mind and wants to knock Andy out, he gets knocked out again. I'm (training) Michael Hunter to fight the winner. He beat Ruiz on the mercy rule in the amateurs. I would like my guy to get a shot at the winner."

PREDICTION: JOSHUA

PINKLON THOMAS
WBC TITLEHOLDER (1984-86)

"Everybody thought Joshua would go right through Ruiz because of his experience and size. I think he took the fight lightly, but Ruiz came out and jumped on him, and once he hit Joshua and found out this guy's not invincible, he took it to him. Joshua wasn't prepared for war. He thought he was going to be able to control this guy with the jab and step around him. Joshua is going to get the same type of action that he got before, maybe even more now. He better have prepared himself to stick and move on this guy, because you can't stand in front of Ruiz. If Joshua has prepared himself, I think he can possibly win a decision. I don't think Joshua is going to knock this guy out. To be honest with you, I think Joshua showed that he doesn't have a great chin, and he might get hit on the chin again. I'm going to go with Ruiz; I'm going to give it about eight rounds."

PREDICTION: RUIZ

★ ★ ★

MIKE WEAVER
WBA TITLEHOLDER (1980-82)

"I really believe Joshua wasn't into the first fight. He got hit hard and never recovered. But I don't think he took the fight too seriously. I really didn't give Ruiz a chance to beat Joshua, but he has fast hands, he hits pretty hard and he's determined. I think Joshua will come back next time in better shape and more focused. Joshua will go in with a different attitude. Not taking anything away from Ruiz, but I think Joshua is a better fighter. Next time, he knows what he has to do: use his jab, box him. If I had to pick a winner, I pick Joshua. I think there will be a stoppage."

PREDICTION: JOSHUA

★ ★ ★

TIM WITHERSPOON
WBC TITLEHOLDER (1984), WBA TITLEHOLDER (1986)

"The first fight didn't really shock me, because I know that some boxers underestimate their opponents based on the way they look. That comes down to a lack of experience with Joshua's team. You can't just look at a guy and assume you're going to walk over him. I tried to get messages to Anthony Joshua so that I could help him. He's a good man, a good human being, but he doesn't have the skills yet. He had the skills to get to a certain level, but when it gets real serious and your trainer can't get you through, it's time to ask for help. (Robert) McCracken is a good guy, but he's taken Joshua as far as he's gonna take him. When I was fighting, I was relaxed in the ring because I had a great teacher ('Slim' Jim Robinson). Thank God I had Slim as my trainer, because there are a lot of ex-boxers who can't talk good and can't think good. Ruiz is a little limited, and his trainers are limited, but that last fight will enhance his level of performance. I think Joshua will do everything he can to win, but when that bell rings, we're still going to see the same skills. It's who hits who first, because some of that fight looked like a barroom brawl, and there just wasn't enough skill. If Joshua hasn't added defensive skills to his game, we could see the same thing again."

PREDICTION: RUIZ

TOTALS: RUIZ 4 / JOSHUA 6 / UNDECIDED 2

EVERLAST
PONY
PONY

GREATEST HITS: EASTON ASSASSINATIONS

LARRY HOLMES USED GUTS, INTELLIGENCE AND A CANNON-LIKE JAB TO STAMP HIS NAME IN THE LINEAGE OF HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONS

By **Tom Gray**

Joe Frazier decimated opponents with the left hook. George Foreman's wrecking ball right hand struck fear into the heart of the heavyweight division. Mike Tyson's uppercut was as accurate as it was pulverizing. But for Larry Holmes, it was the stick, that face-busting left jab that led to one of the most dominant title reigns the glamour division has ever seen. It really was the most exquisite of heavyweight signature moves.

Holmes departed the amateur ranks with a less-than-modest record of 19-3. In his final two unpaid bouts, during the 1972 Olympic trials, the stick-and-mover from Easton, Pennsylvania, was stopped in one round by Nick Wells and disqualified for holding against Duane Bobick. No one, absolutely no one, was tipping Holmes as a prospective world champion, and many critics labeled him a "quitter."

Turning professional in March 1973, the 23-year-old Holmes was essentially learning on the job. But he worked hard in the gym and received invaluable experience as a sparring partner, cutting his teeth under the likes of Joe Frazier, Earnie Shavers and even "The Greatest" himself, Muhammad Ali.

"There was no holding back from Ali, but I held back a little because he was the champ and I wasn't there to hurt him," said Holmes, who was still an amateur when he began sparring the great former champion in 1971 and remained a regular camp member until 1975.

"People would have paid money to watch me and Ali in sparring. We also did one or two exhibitions when I was younger, one of them in Reading (Pennsylvania). That work made me a better fighter. If you work with the best, you become the best. I learned how he jabbed, I learned how to throw the right hand and I learned how to not get hit."

By June 1978, Holmes had taken his unbeaten record to 27-0 (19 knockouts) and had posted excellent decision wins over the fearsome Roy Williams and ex-employer Shavers. The latter of those two victories saw Holmes installed as the No. 1 challenger for Ken Norton's WBC heavyweight title, and the war was on. This was baptism by fire.

The lightning-quick Holmes got off to a terrific start, jabbing Norton at will and landing with eye-catching combinations. By the midway point, however, Norton was landing bombs and the challenger was bleeding profusely from the mouth. Following an incredible battle, which culminated in arguably the greatest 15th round in boxing history, Holmes was declared the winner by split decision.

Having worked so hard for his prize, the new champion was in no mood to give it up. Holmes made 20 successful defenses over the next seven-and-a-half years. Among his victims were Mike Weaver, Shavers, Trevor Berbick, Leon Spinks, Gerry Cooney, Tim Witherspoon and a faded version of Ali. In late 1983, Holmes would trade the WBC heavyweight title for the inaugural IBF version, but boxing politics were irrelevant. Holmes, who also held the Ring championship from 1980, was the best.

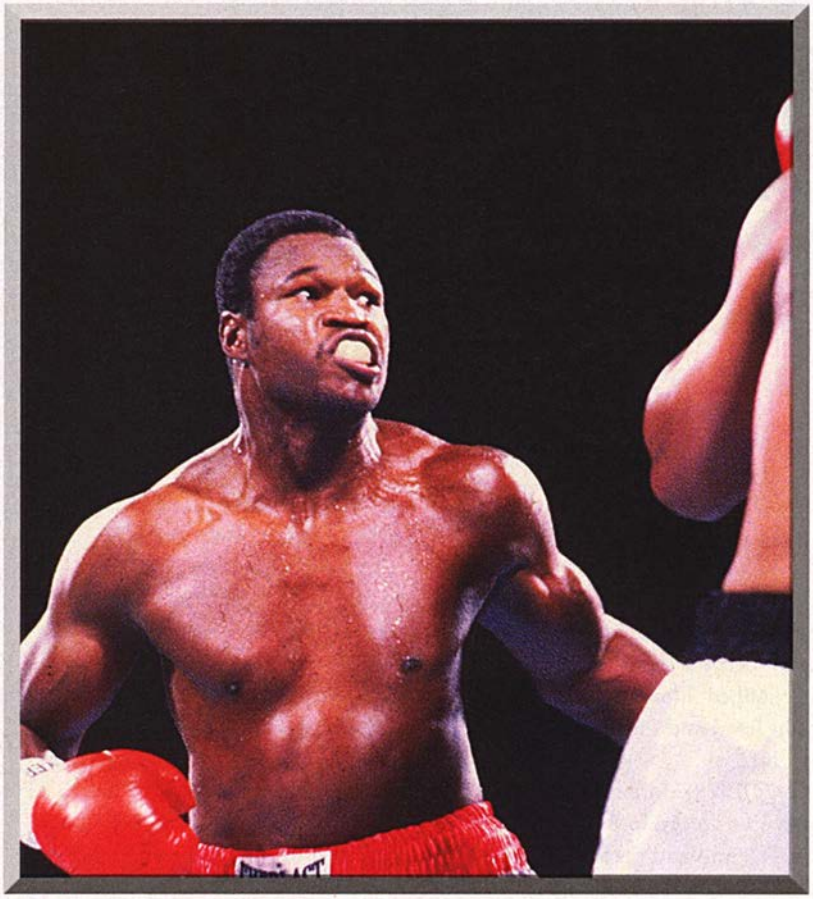
In September 1985, light heavyweight king Michael Spinks sensationally outpointed Holmes in Las Vegas. That setback was hard to take for a variety of reasons. Holmes was a born winner, and he'd fallen just one victory shy of Rocky Marciano's legendary 49-0 mark. A rejuvenated version of the ex-champ appeared to have done enough to win a Spinks rematch in April 1986, but the judges – whose colleagues Holmes had berated following the first fight – went against him.

"People got mad at me because I was winning so much," offered Holmes, his voice rising. "They were jealous because I could win. They'd all said that Larry Holmes couldn't fight; Howard Cosell and all the rest. He became a believer, though, and so did everybody else. You're a believer too, right?"

Anyone who knows the sport of boxing is a believer when it comes to Larry Holmes. That unquenchable desire to prove people wrong is what made him what he was as a fighter.

Holmes challenged three more times for the championship but fell short. He was knocked out by Mike Tyson in 1988 and outpointed by Evander Holyfield and Oliver McCall in 1992 and 1995, respectively. The great ex-champion fought on until he was 52 years old, retiring for good with a record of 69-6 (44 knockouts).

We now go back in time to revisit eight of The Easton Assassin's greatest hits:



ROY WILLIAMS

April 30, 1976/ Capital Centre, Landover, Maryland • Titles: Non-title bout

"Roy Williams was a big guy – 6-foot-5, strong, real strong. I knew I had to box him, because I'd worked with him before (in sparring). He hit hard – not real hard, but he was strong on the inside. I had to stay on the outside and work him, not stand still. At one time, Williams was considered a top prospect, but he couldn't get a title shot because nobody wanted to fight him. The only reason I fought him is because (promoter) Don King told me I had to. I don't think Don expected me to win, but I knew I could outbox him, and that's what I did. (Muhammad) Ali was in the main event that night against Jimmy Young, and I watched the whole fight. Jimmy boxed him, moved, and when Ali got close, he tied him up. He didn't get the decision, because everyone loved Ali. Jimmy Young needed a knockout that night."

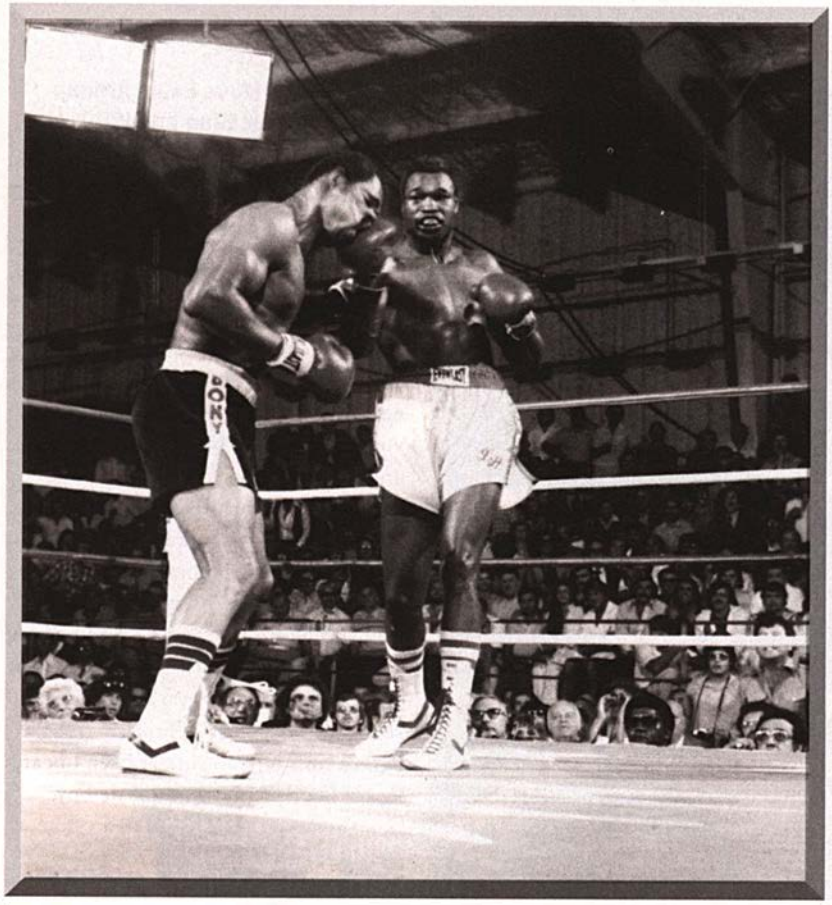
RESULT: HOLMES UD 10

EARNIE SHAVERS

March 25, 1978/Caesars Palace Sports Pavilion, Las Vegas • Titles: Non-title bout

"I knew I could beat Earnie. I knew he'd run out of stamina after four or five rounds, so I just had to box him. It was my first 12-rounder, I fought at my own pace and I didn't want to get myself involved in a war. You don't fight against a guy like that – box, box, box. I gotta win, so I outboxed him, because he was strong and he was always ready to go. I'd sparred Earnie and knew how big a puncher he was. The money was really good for training with him, so I did that. He was another guy that I didn't wanna fight, but I had to fight him if I wanted a title shot. For four or five rounds against Earnie, you're in trouble, so you need to box and stay away from him. That's the only way to win."

RESULT: HOLMES UD 12

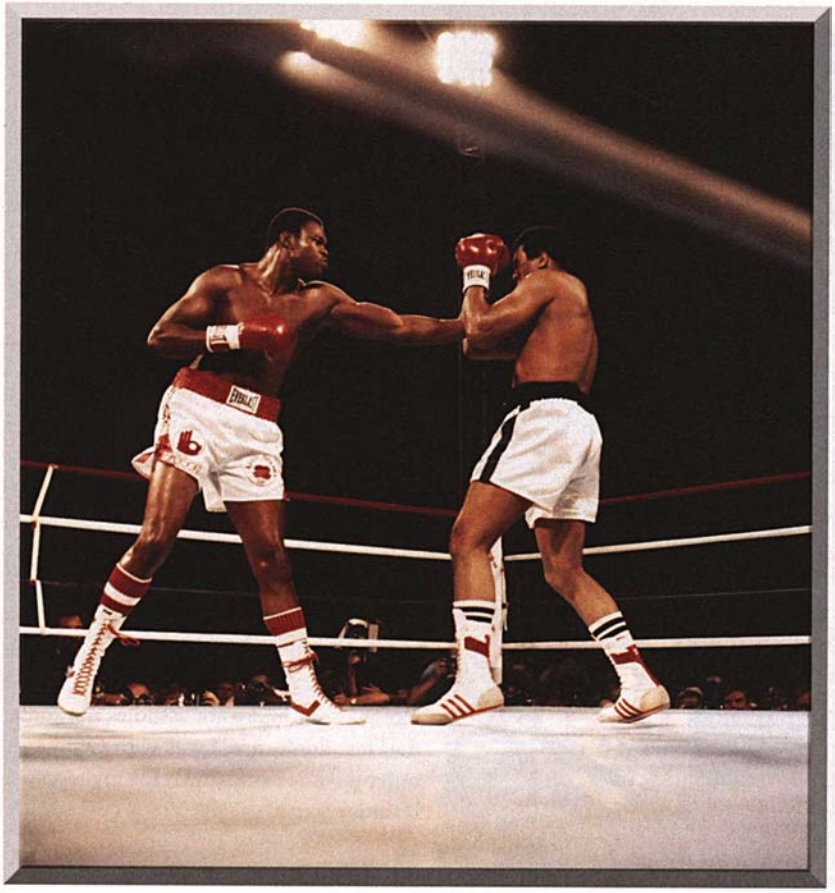


KEN NORTON

June 9, 1978/Caesars Palace Sports Pavilion, Las Vegas • Titles: WBC heavyweight

"Norton was there to fight, and that was the hardest fight I ever had. When I fought Shavers, it was nothing like that. When I fought Cooney, it was nothing like that. It was also hot that night and I lost seven pounds in the one hour that fight lasted. I was so determined to win, and that's what got me through the 15th round. He's puttin' pressure on me … I'm puttin' pressure on him … He's puttin' pressure on me … I'm puttin' pressure on him. I thought I was winning the fight from the beginning, because I used my jab, outboxed him and kept moving. I didn't realize it was that close (going into the 15th round), but I came out victorious, and I was happy. I'd been written off my whole life: 'Larry ain't nuthin, Larry ain't gonna be nuthin.' I proved all of them wrong, and victory was sweet."

RESULT: HOLMES SD 15

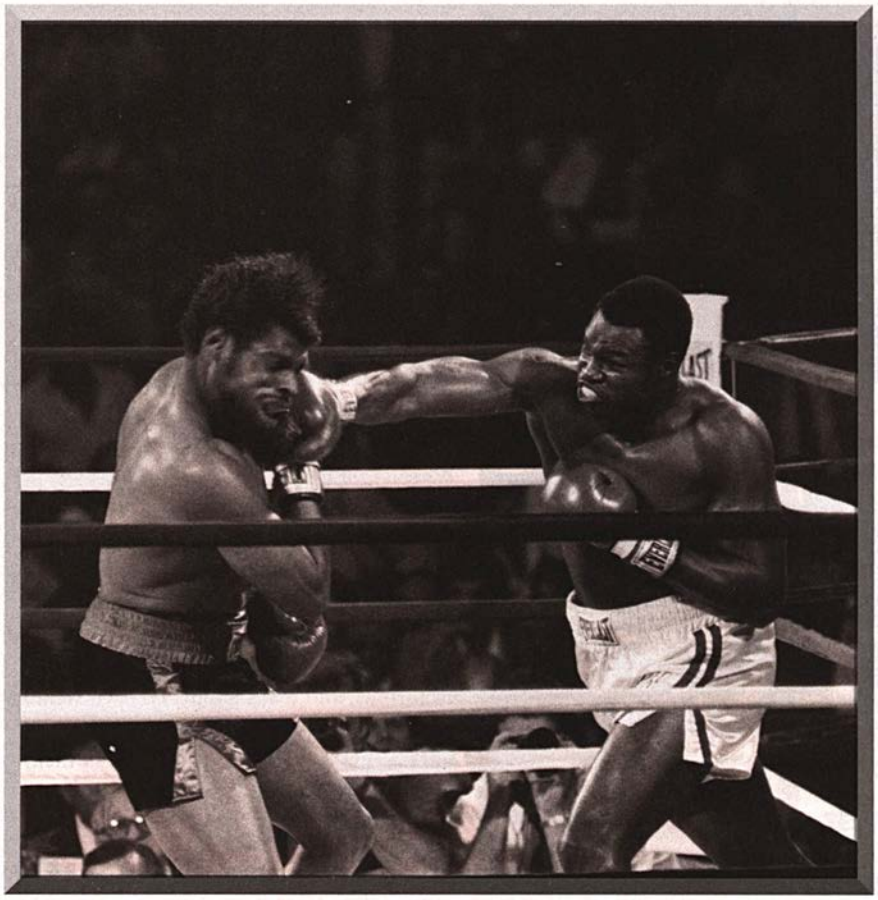


MUHAMMAD ALI

October 2, 1980/Caesars Palace Outdoor Arena, Las Vegas • Titles: Ring and WBC heavyweight

"It was tough, mentally, because I didn't want to hurt him. I knew what Ali could do, and I knew what I could do. I'd worked with him for so long; we'd sparred hundreds of rounds together, for years, so I knew everything about him. He was my friend, but I couldn't let my emotions get the better of me. I didn't want to hurt him, so I boxed and was aiming to win a decision. It's kill or be killed in the ring, but I still didn't try to hurt him that night. I'm not a mercenary. I'm not a George Foreman or a Joe Frazier, looking to kill you with one punch. Jody Ballard (former heavyweight contender and Holmes' sparring partner) once said I was the meanest guy in the ring, but what Jody means is, I was serious. I can box and I can fight – I don't want to hurt you, but if you try to hurt me, I'm gonna hurt you."

RESULT: HOLMES TKO 10

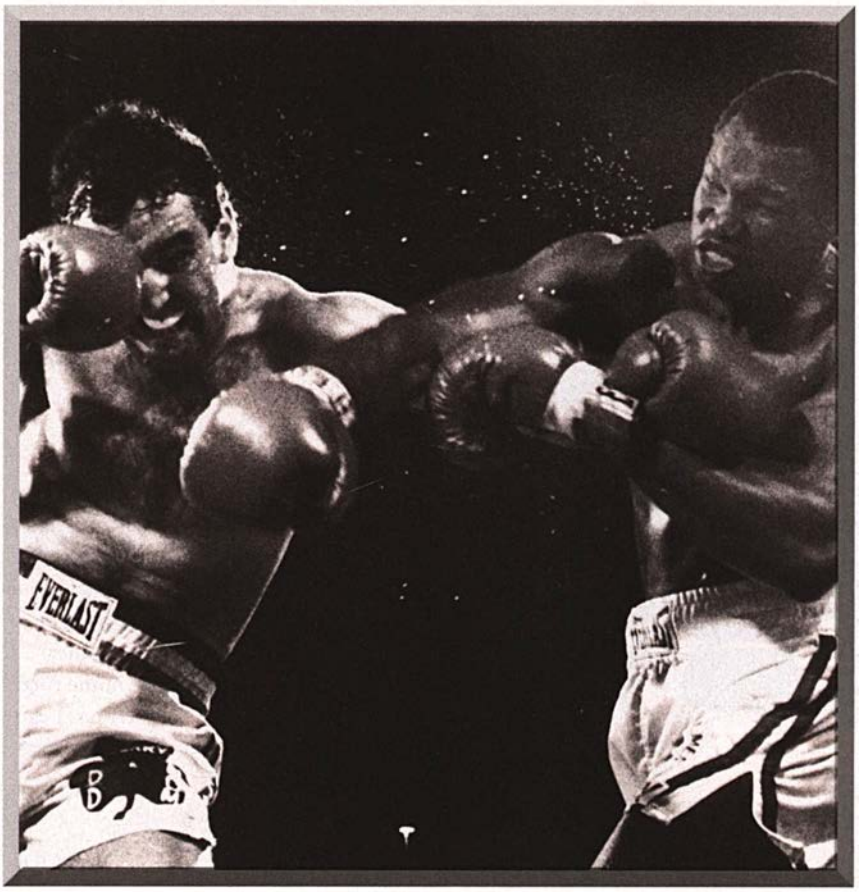


LEON SPINKS

June 12, 1981/Joe Louis Arena, Detroit • Titles: Ring and WBC heavyweight

"It was a pleasure to fight Leon. First of all, I'm a fighter. And we all go out there to do the best we can. Just don't cross the line with me; don't call me names, don't cuss me out, don't call my wife names, don't call my kids names. You don't do that! I know that you want to win, but just come out and kick my ass if you can. Leon got under my skin before the fight, and I said, 'OK, I'm gonna knock your ass out!' He was made for me, because of his style. He's not 6-foot-3, he don't box and move, side to side. Leon come straight at me, and if you come straight at me, you're my target. Leon came straight at me like Joe Frazier, and Leon's certainly not Joe Frazier. I beat up on Leon like he was a little boy."

RESULT: HOLMES TKO 3

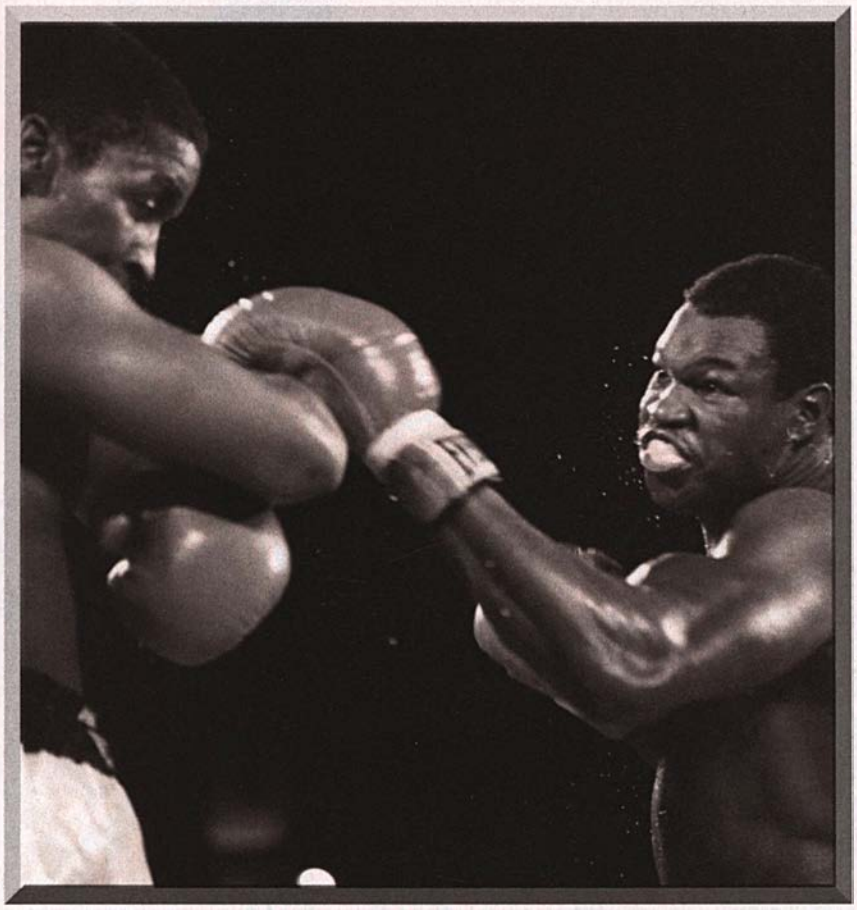


GERRY COONEY

June 11, 1982/Caesars Palace Outdoor Arena, Las Vegas • Titles: Ring and WBC heavyweight

"If I don't knock Gerry out, I lose that fight. They were setting me up to lose. They would do anything. They blew up my mailbox, called me 'nigger.' There was a lot of shit. I'll tell you what, people still do it! To this day, there are people who will drive by my house and yell, 'Go home, nigger!' But I am home, this is my house, now get the hell out of here! They don't want to remember my fight with Gerry Cooney. I don't want to remember how I was treated before that fight. Gerry Cooney don't want to remember how I was treated before that fight. Gerry don't want people to act like that. But there are assholes out there that just don't care. I was with Gerry the other day; he came down for my son's birthday party."

RESULT: HOLMES TKO 13

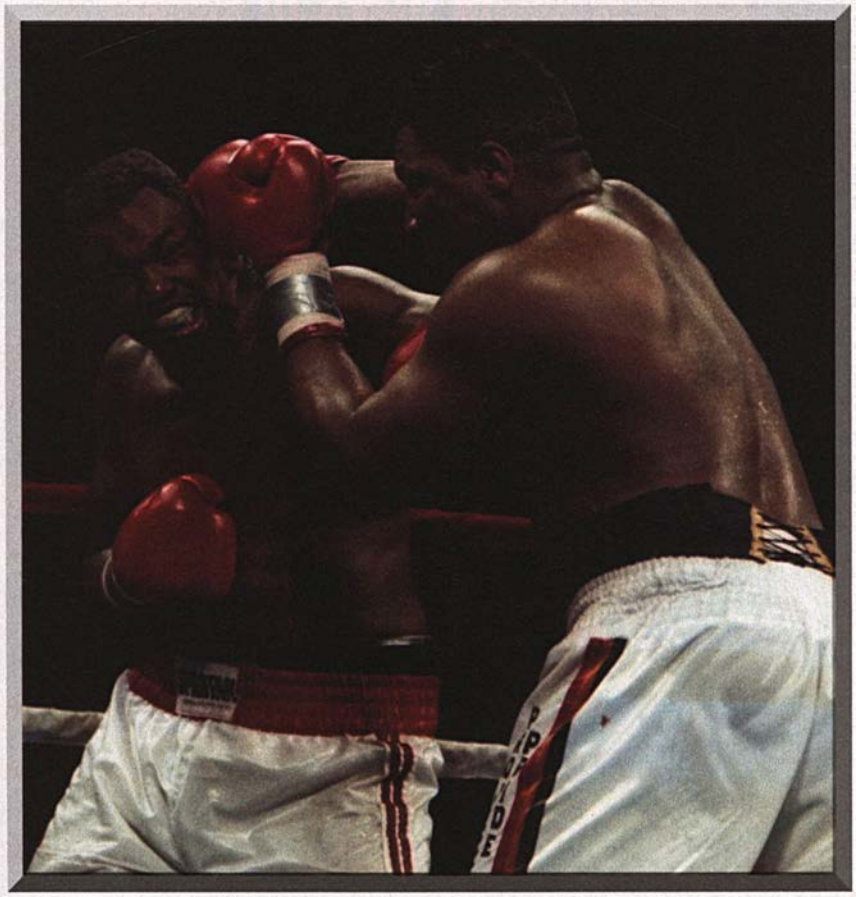


TIM WITHERSPOON

May 20, 1983/Dunes Hotel & Casino, Las Vegas • Titles: Ring and WBC heavyweight

"I wasn't surprised that the Witherspoon fight was close, because I was prepared for anything when I went in the ring. The only surprise for me was that he didn't respect me. It was a hard fight, a close fight, but I thought I won. If I'm being honest, I trained too hard for that fight. My weight was really low (Holmes was 213 pounds and would never be that light again in his professional career) and I'd definitely overtrained. By that time, I'd been champion too long and (the system) wanted me out. They couldn't control me. The press labeled me as the bad guy, and anything I did, the press would pick it up. If Larry Holmes does something, then he's low class, and I hate this and I hate that. If Gerry Cooney does something, it's OK."

RESULT: HOLMES SD 12



RAY MERCER

February 7, 1992/Convention Center, Atlantic City • Titles: Non-title bout

"That was a good fight. I wasn't as sharp as I would have been in my younger days, but I was good enough, and it was a great fight. I fought for money. I didn't fight to be the heavyweight champion of the world; I fought to feed my family. I wanted to make sure that I had something when I finished fighting. When I signed a contract to fight, it was money that was on my mind. Don't get me wrong, I never thought about losing; that word wasn't in my vocabulary. I do not lose. Nobody wants a loser. But let me tell you something: I am now 69 years old, and if you give me enough time, I could fight now. I'm just as good now as I was at 42 years old. I could beat these guys. The champions that they have now, give me two months and I could beat them all."

RESULT: HOLMES UD 12

RISKY BUSINESS

DEONTAY WILDER, BOXING'S MOST DANGEROUS AND VULNERABLE KO ARTIST, FACES **LUIS ORTIZ** IN A REMATCH THAT COULD (ONCE AGAIN) UPSET THE DELICATE BALANCE OF THE HEAVYWEIGHT DIVISION

By **Brin-Jonathan Butler**

RYAN HAFEY / PREMIER BOXING CHAMPIONS

Back in November 2018, in the lead-up to WBC heavyweight titleholder Deontay Wilder squaring off against lineal champion Tyson Fury at the Staples Center in Los Angeles, I flew down to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, to catch the last two days of sparring in Wilder's training camp. There were three sparring partners, each specifically chosen for his Fury-like stature, and one of them even conspicuously formulated his style the best he could to create an ersatz karaoke of Fury's uniquely awkward movements and tactics in the ring. Several journalists had flown in from the United Kingdom to cover Wilder-Fury. They all stood silently mystified at the back of the gym observing Wilder as he struggled to deal with the fairly pedestrian problems the sparring partners presented.

In contrast to what we were looking at, Wilder's trainer, Jay Deas, shouted enthusiastic encouragement at his fighter and smiled approvingly: "That's it, D! Beautiful! Be first, D!" A sign hung above the ring celebrated "The Next Heavyweight Champion of the World, The Bronze Bomber!!" The "Next" had been crossed out with a sharpie, replaced with "NEW." Another sign listed two columns of champions, divided by "Short Term CHAMPS" and "Long Term CHAMPS." Leon Spinks, Trevor Berbick, Pinklon Thomas, Tony Tubbs, Frank Bruno and Bermane Stiverne comprised the former column; Rocky Marciano, Muhammad Ali, George Foreman, Larry Holmes, Lennox Lewis and DEONTAY WILDER rounded out the latter. Wilder had held his championship for just under four years at that point after defeating Stiverne.

In between rounds, I approached the group of British journalists and whispered a question about what they made so far of watching the 40-0 American champion with 39 knockouts on his résumé spar. The most senior of the group turned to me with an almost embarrassed look on his face and confessed, "If this here is where Wilder's at when he steps into the ring? Well, if Wilder can't knock out Fury, he might easily lose every round with Fury boxing circles around him."

The bell rang and we stood and watched several more rounds until they had wrapped up sparring for the evening. Nothing I witnessed dissuaded me from accepting the British boxing writer's assessment. Two glaring, parallel truths encompass watching Deontay Wilder work up close: If Wilder isn't in possession of one of the most dangerous right hands in the history of boxing, he certainly wields the most formidable weapon today; secondly, he frequently demonstrates such surreal absence of coordination and technique while engaged in combat that you can't shake the feeling you might be watching the most crude practitioner of the sweet science ever to hold a title. I simultaneously believe Wilder's offensive gifts would pose a serious

Ortiz came close to lifting Wilder's WBC title last year and, despite his age, the Cuban remains a threat.

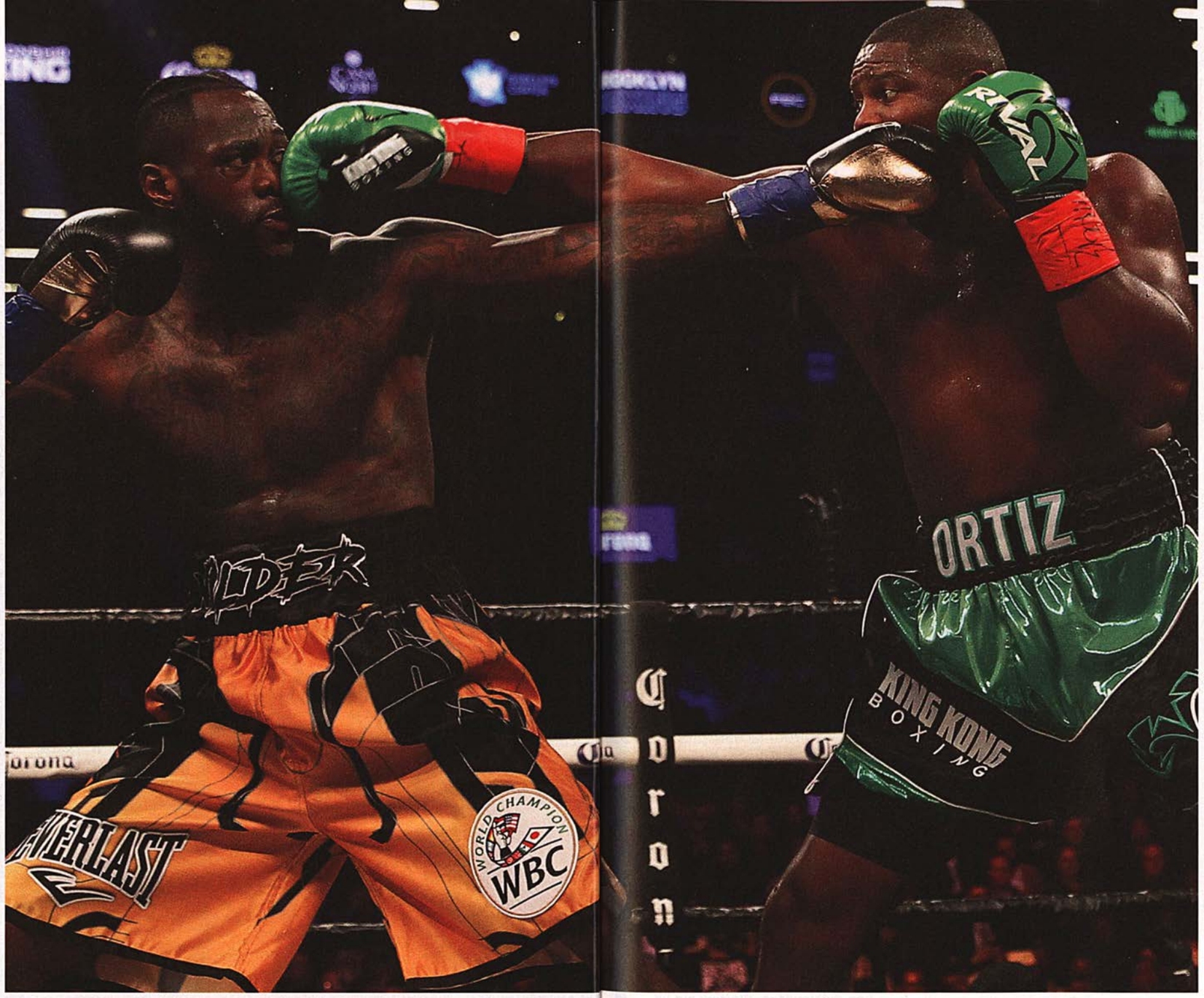
risk to any heavyweight champion who ever lived while also believing he engenders more than enough liabilities as a boxer to comfortably lose on even a mildly off night against virtually any elite heavyweight contender today: Andy Ruiz Jr., Anthony Joshua, Luis Ortiz, Fury, Aleksandr Usyk.

On December 1, 2018, at the Staples Center, according to many fight fans and writers, Wilder lived up to the U.K. writer's prediction that night in Tuscaloosa. If Wilder didn't lose every round he was unable to put Fury on the canvas, he certainly didn't win even one of those rounds convincingly. The judges handed down a draw for the contest and Wilder retained his title to a roar of boos.

This was the second fight in a row in which Wilder narrowly retained his title. Only nine months prior at Barclays Center in Brooklyn, New York, in the seventh round, if Luis Ortiz had 20 more seconds, he might well have finished off a badly rocked Wilder. Instead, Wilder overcame adversity to storm back with a vicious knockout victory in the 10th. As with Fury, the drama and action between Wilder and Ortiz made it easily one of the most exciting fights of the year.

Now a November 23 date with "King Kong" Ortiz again stands in the way of a mega-rematch with Fury in February. But the formidable heavyweight landscape has shifted considerably over the last couple years. All kinds of vulnerabilities have been exposed among the titans in the division. Back on June 1, Joshua was on the losing end of the biggest heavyweight upset since Buster Douglas knocked out Mike Tyson. Like Tyson before him, Joshua's aura of invincibility was obliterated by Ruiz, a vast underdog, who from the opening bell fought every second of the fight to win rather than survive against a champion of Joshua's stature. The undefeated Fury miraculously avoided being knocked out by Wilder in one of the most dramatic moments in heavyweight championship history. Ortiz was likely one clean blow away from flattening Wilder. Hundreds of millions of dollars remain up for grabs with several permutations of megafights available if promoters can get their ducks lined up in a row. Tune-ups and marinating these megafights, as we've seen, offer all kinds of risks with this crop of titleholders. What looked like a golden age in the heavyweight division with three undefeated champions playing musical chairs to unify the title now threatens to be derailed by boxing politics before the most lucrative, landmark heavyweight fights of the decade take place. If Joshua loses again to Ruiz, he might well retire before even facing either Wilder or Fury in megafights.

The Cuban "boogeyman" Ortiz, now in his 40s, undefeated prior to his loss to Wilder, has won three fights in a row leading up to the rematch at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas. Despite his age and previous issues failing drug tests, Ortiz proved he had the firepower and poise to become the first Cuban heavyweight champion in history with his previous match against Wilder.



Wilder often displays glaring technical flaws during his fights against world-class opposition, but his frightening punching power bails him out.

Wilder, an 11-year veteran of the sport, now 33 years of age, has successfully defended his title nine times. He has the opportunity to make a real statement in the division as the dominant heavyweight of his era if he can back up his prediction of an early knockout against Ortiz. Ortiz has the opportunity to avenge the only loss on his résumé and transform the heavyweight division nearly as much as Ruiz did against Joshua.

What makes the rematch between Wilder and Ortiz so compelling is not just what hangs in the balance for either fighter if they win, but how much both have to prove from their previous fight. Ortiz likely knows if he fails in this opportunity, another at this stage of his career is unlikely, which could mean we see him go for broke in an all-out assault early. Wilder's ego and competitiveness might welcome such an approach, despite the precarious situation he overcame in the seventh round against Ortiz last time. But Wilder has now held a title for four years, and the defining fight of his career supplied Tyson Fury with one of the great comeback stories in the annals of boxing. To his credit, the Alabamian is fighting not just for massive paydays but also for his place in history; he is in his prime with the next two years poised to define his lasting legacy, and the risky Ortiz rematch stands in the way.

Wilder has fought without a loss for 11 years, and his supporters point to his menacing 98 percent knockout-to-win ratio as evidence of being his era's dominant heavyweight. If one scenario plays out, Ortiz might be the first step toward running the table with the likes of Ruiz, Joshua, Fury or the emerging Aleksandr Usyk. The other scenario might look something like undefeated heavyweight giant Michael Grant in 2000 before stepping into the ring with Lennox Lewis in Madison Square Garden for the IBF and WBC titles. Grant's résumé included 31 victories and 22 knockouts, and his imposing stature and power had some voices in the sport suggesting he might assume the mantle of boxing's next dominant champion. In two rounds, Lewis concluded any discussion of Grant being a generational talent. The same might happen for Wilder if he's on the losing end of an iconic knockout loss at the hands of Joshua, Ruiz, Fury or Usyk. It almost happened against an aging Luis Ortiz.

What makes Wilder the most exciting fighter in the sport to watch is how he bizarrely and simultaneously encompasses the potential for both extreme scenarios. With every signature fight of his career, just as much as every round of sparring in Tuscaloosa, a knockout never seems far away – one way or the other.

ICON SPORTSWIRE

A LASTING IMPRESSION

PATRICK DAY, TAKEN LONG BEFORE HIS TIME, HAD AN EFFECT ON EVERYONE HE MET

By **Michael Montero**

It was early afternoon, Thursday, October 10, inside the JW Marriott in downtown Chicago. We were halfway through the final press conference for the Aleksandr Usyk-Chazz Witherspoon card. It was the typical mundane fight-week presser. To the left and right of me was a mix of fellow boxing scribes, photographers, YouTube guys and a smattering of fighters' friends and family, most of whom were playing on their smartphones. Matchroom Boxing's Eddie Hearn introduced a series of undercard fighters at the podium. One by one they spoke, keeping words short and sweet, with a pinch of the typical stiffness and awkwardness that many have while speaking in front of a crowd of strangers. Then suddenly the mood in the room changed.

Patrick Day was behind the podium. Everyone to the left and right of me stopped tweeting for a second and focused their eyes on the stage. The Long Islander's infectious smile and smooth delivery on the mic had captivated the entire room.

"Everybody here looks great," said Day with a smile on his face, "Thank God that we're all here healthy. I'm excited. I always have a lot to prove for every fight. People look at me and my demeanor and say, 'You're such a nice guy. You're so well-spoken. Why do you choose to box?' It's about what's in your heart. I have a fighter's soul, a fighter's spirit. Boxing makes me happy, so that's why I chose to do it."

I turned to my fiancée, Tiffany Lam, a boxing photographer/videographer who was helping me cover the Usyk-Witherspoon card for The Ring, and said, "This kid has a future after boxing." She agreed. We spent the next few minutes commenting on Day. "He could be a commentator when he's done fighting." "I could see this kid on Wall Street." "Hell, he could be an actor." "He's so good-looking and comfortable on camera." We spoke about him later that evening as we were chopping up video of the presser for The Ring's YouTube channel, and the following morning during the weigh-ins. An instant, lasting impression had been made. And it started with the simplest of things – a big, bright, unforgettable smile.

The following evening, on Saturday, October 12, inside Wintrust Arena, Day was stopped by Charles Conwell at 1:46 of the 10th and final round of their junior middleweight bout. He had been dropped twice earlier in the fight before a flush left hook put him down for good. It was a crushing knockout. Day appeared to be unconscious before even going down, the back of his head slamming loudly on the canvas. His eyes were rolled in the back of his head, his right arm and leg were twitching. You could hear a pin drop in the arena.

He would never regain consciousness.

Moments later, Day was hooked up to an oxygen mask, stabilized and carried out of the ring on a stretcher by medical personnel. I was in the first row of the press section, in the corner right next to the path where the fighters were making their ring walks. The entire incident played out directly in front of me. Seeing Patrick Day pass by on that stretcher left another instant, lasting impression on me. One that I'll never forget.

Day was immediately rushed to Northwestern Memorial Hospital, just three miles north of Wintrust Arena, where doctors would later perform emergency brain surgery. Promoter Lou DiBella asked that the boxing media not press for updates out of respect for the Day family. We were told that Patrick was in a coma and in critical condition. There was an outpouring of support on social media from the boxing community. Everyone tried to think positively, as he always appeared to do, and hope for the best. But on Wednesday, October 16, with his parents by his side, Patrick Day succumbed to his injuries and passed away at just 27 years old.

This was the first time since I began covering boxing that I witnessed a fighter lose consciousness, and ultimately lose their life, from ringside. The dichotomy of seeing a young man so full of life just days prior to losing it made me feel numb. I couldn't imagine what his family and friends must have been going through. The images etched in my mind haunted me, leaving me with questions that kept me awake at night. Am I a soulless, bloodthirsty ghoul for loving boxing? As a member of the media and, in effect, a promoter of the sport, am I partially responsible for tragedies like this? What, if anything, can be done to make boxing safer? What can I do to make a difference? How can I honor Patrick best with the platform I have?

And so here I am typing this. A detailed, technical discussion about how we can make the sport safer will come in a future article. For now, let me tell you everything I came to know about Patrick Day over the

Even those who only had brief contact with Patrick Day were taken by his warmth, enthusiasm and passion for boxing.

short time that I saw him up close. Day was never going to be a world champion or a main event fighter, but that didn't matter. Some people just have an energy about them, a light, an aura. Whatever you want to call it, Patrick had "it." That was undeniable from the moment you met him. He was going to be a champion in life. He was going to succeed in whatever avenue he decided to take. I had never covered one of Patrick's fights prior to the Usyk-Witherspoon card. After all, most of his bouts had been in the New York area and I came up on the Los Angeles fight beat. But in the few days that I did cover Patrick Day, he exposed me to all humanity has to offer. Beauty, surprise, happiness, shock, sadness, unanswerable questions and more.

Patrick, you not only left an impression on me, but on everyone who ever met you. In an instant, you lifted the mood of anyone who simply witnessed your smile. That's the sort of impact that goes deeper than any title belt ever could; it transcends boxing and touches the human spirit. And that makes you a champion in our hearts, forever. RING

Michael Montero can be found on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram via @MonteroOnBoxing. His weekly podcast 'The Neutral Corner' can be heard on iTunes, Spotify, iHeartRadio and elsewhere.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

GENNADIY GOLOVKIN VS. SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO WAS A THRILLER WITH A POTENTIAL BREAKOUT PERFORMANCE, BUT IT'S ALMOST LIKE IT NEVER HAPPENED

By **Mitch Abramson**

When Gennadiy Golovkin captured a razor-thin decision against Sergiy Derevyanchenko on October 5, it was hailed as an instant classic.

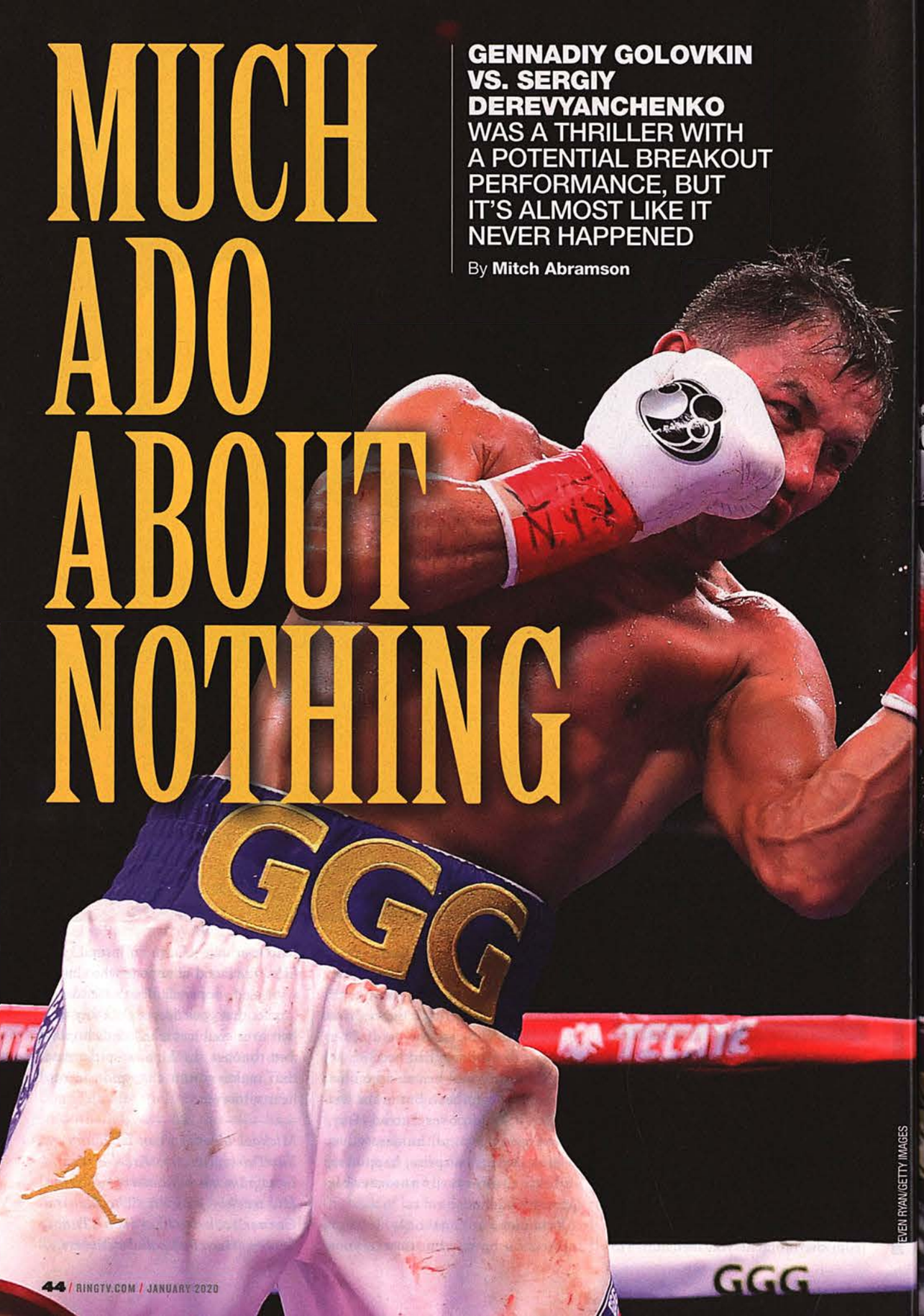
And the headlines weren't wrong.

The fight was so brutal that neither fighter attended the post-fight press conference, instead making a beeline to a local hospital to get checked out. The two exchanged bombs all night, each rallying whenever the other gained a foothold.

But for all the in-ring action, it remains to be seen if anything of consequence will result from the barnburner in which Golovkin – possibly the most entertaining fighter of his generation – was actually booed in the ring at Madison Square Garden while giving a post-fight interview on the streaming service DAZN.

Such was the weirdly unsatisfying aftermath of what may end up being the fight of the year.

The bout itself had a little bit of everything: A knockdown in the first round after Golovkin landed a right hand behind Derevyanchenko's ear; more swings than a playground with both fighters inflicting damage;



STEVEN RYAN/GETTY IMAGES

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Derevyanchenko backing up Golovkin and raising his game while dealing with a hellacious cut; and finally, the 37-year-old Golovkin standing his ground and showing his toughness and resilience while trying to defy age.

What we didn't get was any sense that the middleweight division was any different after the decision was announced. The major storylines hadn't changed. The favored fighter won.

Not to get all 8th grade English class here, but the bout, for all its roller-coaster momentum shifts and high-level drama, was sort of Shakespearean, "full of sound and fury" but not much more.

Maybe that's underselling the significance of the fight, since Golovkin did pick up the IBF middleweight belt and is now a two-time world titleholder.

But that was expected.

The fight was better than most people thought, but the final outcome didn't much surprise anyone – the fighters were positioned exactly where most thought they would be after the fight. Golovkin, the bigger star, had his hand raised, as expected, even if the road traveled was far more winding and unpredictable.

There were other outcomes that weren't exactly surprising.

Despite demonstrating he is among the middleweight elite after his less-than-inspiring performance against Jack Culcay in April, Derevyanchenko is basically back to where he was after he lost a hotly contested split decision to Danny Jacobs in 2018: respected and lauded while left with few options for another megafight (for now), too dangerous for the cream of the division to risk their records and titles (for now).

And Golovkin?

As of this writing, he was reportedly headed toward making a mandatory defense against Kamil Szeremeta (21-0, 5 KOs) in the first quarter of 2020, and then he will presumably wait for a third

Derevyancheko gave Golovkin the hardest fight of the middleweight star's career but fell short of the 'W.'

lucrative fight with Canelo Alvarez, leaving Derevyanchenko without a substantial dance partner (again ... for now).

Things can obviously change, and Golovkin could suddenly decide he wants to face Derevyanchenko again to erase any doubt.

Yet that didn't appear to be the direction he was leaning.

And that's a shame, because the Ukrainian could have easily been awarded the decision after his gutsy performance.

A win for Derevyanchenko would have upended the division, upsetting Golovkin's chances for a third fight with Canelo and heralding a new star. Instead, the stars remained unchanged.

Judges Frank Lombardi and Eric Molinski each scored it 115-112; judge Kevin Morgan produced a 114-113 score, the one-point difference from Golovkin's knockdown in the first round.

Derevyanchenko's team was rightfully frustrated with the decision and didn't waste any time lobbying for an immediate rematch from ringside after the scores were announced.

"First of all, it was the fight of the year," said Derevyanchenko manager Keith Connolly. "There has to be a rematch. There's no other fight right now, unless Canelo fights him, that anybody else would wanna see. Sergiy proved that he's one of the top few middleweights in the world. The crowd booed Triple-G when he was interviewed and they cheered Sergiy, so obviously, everybody in the building, the writers – even DAZN scored it for Sergiy. Again, when you're the less popular guy, this is the type of stuff that happens. But, I mean, that was definitely, in my eyes, a clear-cut win for Derevyanchenko."

Golovkin appeared almost sheepish

in the ring as he was booed. "I wanna say just thank you so much to my opponent," he said. "(He did) a great job. I respect his team. I told you, he's a very tough guy. This is (a) huge experience for me. You know, right now I understand I need more."

The bout confirmed what we sort of already knew about Golovkin at this point in his career: At the age of 37, he's not the seek-and-destroy predator he was when he knocked out 23 straight opponents.

However, to say that Golovkin (40-1-1, 35 KOs) was exposed on October 5 is to ignore reality. He is 37, an age when fighters are usually winding down their careers, not chasing 29-year-olds, as he is with Canelo.

To put his age into context, Roy Jones Jr. had lost three straight – twice to Antonio Tarver and once to Glen Johnson – by the time he was facing Prince Badi Ajamu at 37 in 2006. Felix "Tito" Trinidad was 35 when he lost to Jones and stopped boxing. Prince Naseem Hamed didn't even hit 30 before he retired.

The point is that Golovkin is held to an impossible standard because of his earlier dominance and now, frankly, he's looking his age. But then we kind of already knew that Golovkin, still extremely formidable and hell to face, was slowing down. He's still one of the best at middleweight.

The only real revelation may have been Derevyanchenko's performance. The Ukrainian raised his game considerably, digging to Golovkin's body, hurting him in the fifth round, and continuously rushing forward to press the advantage, ignoring the deep laceration around his right eye sustained in the second round from a clean left hook.

He briefly dazed Golovkin again in the 10th with a left hook and responded with a volley of punches after Golovkin appeared to stun him with a right hand later in the round, the best stanza of the fight.

Golovkin looked his age vs. Derevyanchenko, but his punches still proved to be heavy and damaging.

Derevyanchenko succeeded in forcing Golovkin to fight off his back foot when many thought the more powerful Kazakhstani would be the one barging forward.

"The cut really changed the fight," Derevyanchenko said. "I couldn't see at times, and he was targeting that eye. But, you know, no excuses. It is what it is. I was trying my best."

They both were.

Only 13 landed punches separated the fighters when the final accounting was done (243 of 720 to 230 of 738) with Golovkin just nudging ahead, according to CompuBox. Not surprisingly, given the closeness of the bout, Derevyanchenko (13-2, 10 KOs) landed more punches against Golovkin than anyone before him.

Lou DiBella, Derevyanchenko's promoter, was left to sort through the rubble and make sense of what had happened. Derevyanchenko got the respect of the fans, but he failed to earn the respect of the judges, and as DiBella spoke, defending his fighter, he seemed to sense what might lay ahead. Without a title, Derevyanchenko will likely have to get back in line.

"I mean, this is one of the best beloved fighters in all of boxing, deservedly," DiBella said of Golovkin. "And there were people booing. What did that tell you? There were a whole lot of people in this room that know what they saw. And they saw a great fighter lose to a guy that knew that this was his moment and wasn't gonna let an early knockdown, wasn't gonna let a vicious cut, wasn't gonna let any of that stop him. That kid fought the fight of his fucking life. And if he doesn't get a rematch, there is no justice."

Shakespeare couldn't have said it better himself.

BIG GAME HUNTING

AFTER CLEANING UP AT CRUISERWEIGHT, UKRAINIAN STAR **ALEKSANDR USYK** HAS TAKEN THE FIRST STEP IN HIS QUEST TO DOMINATE BOXING'S GLAMOUR DIVISION

By **Michael Montero**

Aleksandr Usyk got a "gimme" in his heavyweight debut, but titleholders and contenders loom in his near future.

Things couldn't have gone better for Aleksandr Usyk in 2018. He defeated Mairis Briedis and Murat Gassiev (both in their home countries) to not only become the undisputed cruiserweight champion, but win the inaugural World Boxing Super Series tournament as well. In the fall, he inked a co-promotional deal with Eddie Hearn's Matchroom Boxing, a powerhouse in the sport. After a highlight-reel knockout of Tony Bellew, also in the Englishman's homeland, Usyk was a no-brainer for Fighter of the Year honors from both The Ring and the Boxing Writers Association of America. Having already accomplished everything as a cruiserweight, it was also a no-brainer that the Olympic gold medalist would soon try his hand in the heavyweight division.

The journey in 2019 has proven to be a bumpy one so far.

Early in the year, Usyk's team officially announced his move to heavyweight and that his first opponent would be experienced former title challenger Carlos Takam on May 25. The 2004 Olympian from Cameroon has been in the ring with the likes of Alexander Povetkin, Joseph Parker and Anthony Joshua, and he posed a legitimate first test for Usyk north of 200 pounds. Yet just weeks before their scheduled bout, Usyk withdrew due to a torn bicep that he suffered in training. After rehabbing from his injury, the fight was tentatively rescheduled for the fall, but talks broke down when Takam signed with Joe DeGuardia's Star Boxing, and later a co-promotional deal with Bob Arum, which opened the door for the gatekeeper to face Top Rank's loaded stable of heavyweights, which includes Tyson Fury.

Rumors flew as to who would take Takam's place. Usyk's management negotiated with several fighters, including Russian veteran Andrey Fedosov, but could not strike a deal. Ultimately, the Netherlands' Tyrone Spong agreed to the assignment. The former kickboxing world champion signed on to face Usyk at Chicago's Wintrust Arena on October 12. Finally ... a date, venue and opponent were secured. The large Ukrainian-American population in Chicago responded with brisk ticket sales. It was all systems go for Usyk-Spong when suddenly, just days before the fight, Matchroom was thrust into disaster recovery mode.

On October 7, the Voluntary Anti-Doping Association (VADA) announced that Spong had tested positive for a banned substance. Traces of clomiphene, an estrogen blocker commonly used by dopers along with anabolic steroids, were detected in samples VADA collected from Spong on September 22 and 26. Thousands of tickets had already been sold, and removing Usyk from the card would have been disastrous, so Hearn immediately reached out to opponents on standby. A day later, former National Golden Gloves champ Chazz Witherspoon was announced as Spong's replacement.

On fight night, Witherspoon would show plenty of toughness in the ring with Usyk but served as little more than a punching bag in the end. The Ukrainian began with a measured pace, throwing only 16 total punches in the first round. However, he increased his output every round thereafter, landing 34 of 72 punches in the seventh (21 of 28 power blows), staggering his opponent several times. Ultimately Witherspoon would retire on his stool after the seventh round. Although it was a one-sided fight, the veteran from Philadelphia did manage to get in a few shots of his own, creating a bruise under Usyk's right eye. But Usyk battered the latecomer for the most part, landing a staggering 70 percent of his power punches overall (86 of 123).

The partisan crowd inside the Wintrust Arena made Chicago feel like a home away from home for

BIG GAME HUNTING

Usyk, who improved to 17-0 (13 KOs) with the stoppage win. After nearly a year out of the ring, the longest layoff of his career, it was a solid performance. But it didn't answer any questions. Can he hurt top-level heavyweights? He couldn't drop Witherspoon, who has been down multiple times in his career. Can he take a real heavyweight shot to the chin? Witherspoon was able to land a few right hands and Usyk was fine, but what happens if Deontay Wilder connects with one?

Professional boxers change weight classes all the time, but going from cruiser to heavyweight is a uniquely difficult task. To put it into perspective, when Mikey Garcia moved up two divisions to face Errol Spence Jr. earlier this year, the difference between the lightweight limit of 135 pounds and the welterweight limit of 147 pounds is just under a 9 percent increase. Usyk weighed 215 pounds against Witherspoon, who came in at 242 pounds, an increase of almost 13 percent. Potential fights against Andy Ruiz Jr., Fury, Anthony Joshua and others would pose an even greater disadvantage in natural weight and size.

The list of cruiserweight champions who have gone on to succeed as heavyweights is a short one. The division was established in 1979 by the WBC. Montana native Marvin Camel and Croatian Mate Parlov fought for the vacant title on December 8 of that year. Their first bout ending in a draw, Camel won the rematch to become the first cruiserweight champion on March 31, 1980. Since that time, of the 60-plus fighters who have held titles at cruiserweight, only the great Evander Holyfield would go on to become the legitimate heavyweight champion.

While most of the early cruiserweight titleholders remained in the division, several in recent years have gone after the money and made the jump to heavyweight, with mixed success. Frenchman Jean-Marc Mormeck, Englishman David Haye and Poland's Tomasz Adamek were all briefly recognized as the Ring cruiserweight champion during the mid-to- late 2000s before campaigning as heavyweights. Haye had the most success, going 7-3 (6 KOs) after officially moving up. The Londoner grabbed a title in 2009 when he scored a majority decision over Russian giant Nikolay Valuev in Germany, which eventually led to a fight against unified champion Wladimir Klitschko in 2011. Haye was dominated in a lackluster effort that he blamed on an injured pinky toe. Adamek compiled a heavyweight record of 15-5 (5 KOs), continuing to fight on well past his prime years. He was dominated and stopped in his only title challenge against former WBC titleholder Vitali Klitschko in 2011. Mormeck would go 3-1 as a heavyweight. In 2012, he was pulverized and stopped in four rounds by Wladimir.

Can Usyk achieve the heights that Holyfield did, or will he join the former cruiserweights who fell short? An argument can be made that Usyk is the most accomplished cruiser of all time, fighting in a more mature, universally recognized and heavier division (the weight limit was increased from 190 to 200 pounds in 2003) than Holyfield did. At the same time, it can be argued that Holyfield has better wins at cruiserweight, twice besting future Hall of Famer Dwight Muhammad Qawi. Either way, one thing is certain: The heavyweights of this era are giants compared to those of Holyfield's. When "The Real Deal" fought Mike Tyson in their 1997 rematch, infamous for Tyson biting a piece of his ear off, both men weighed in at 218 pounds. Although Evander did score wins over big heavyweights of the era, including James "Buster" Douglas and George Foreman, he lost two of three bouts against Riddick Bowe and was dominated for most of the 24 rounds he spent in the ring with Lennox Lewis. All of those men were considered "super heavyweights" at the time but would be standard-sized heavyweights today.

Once Usyk warmed up, he exhibited the elite form that made him undisputed cruiserweight champion.

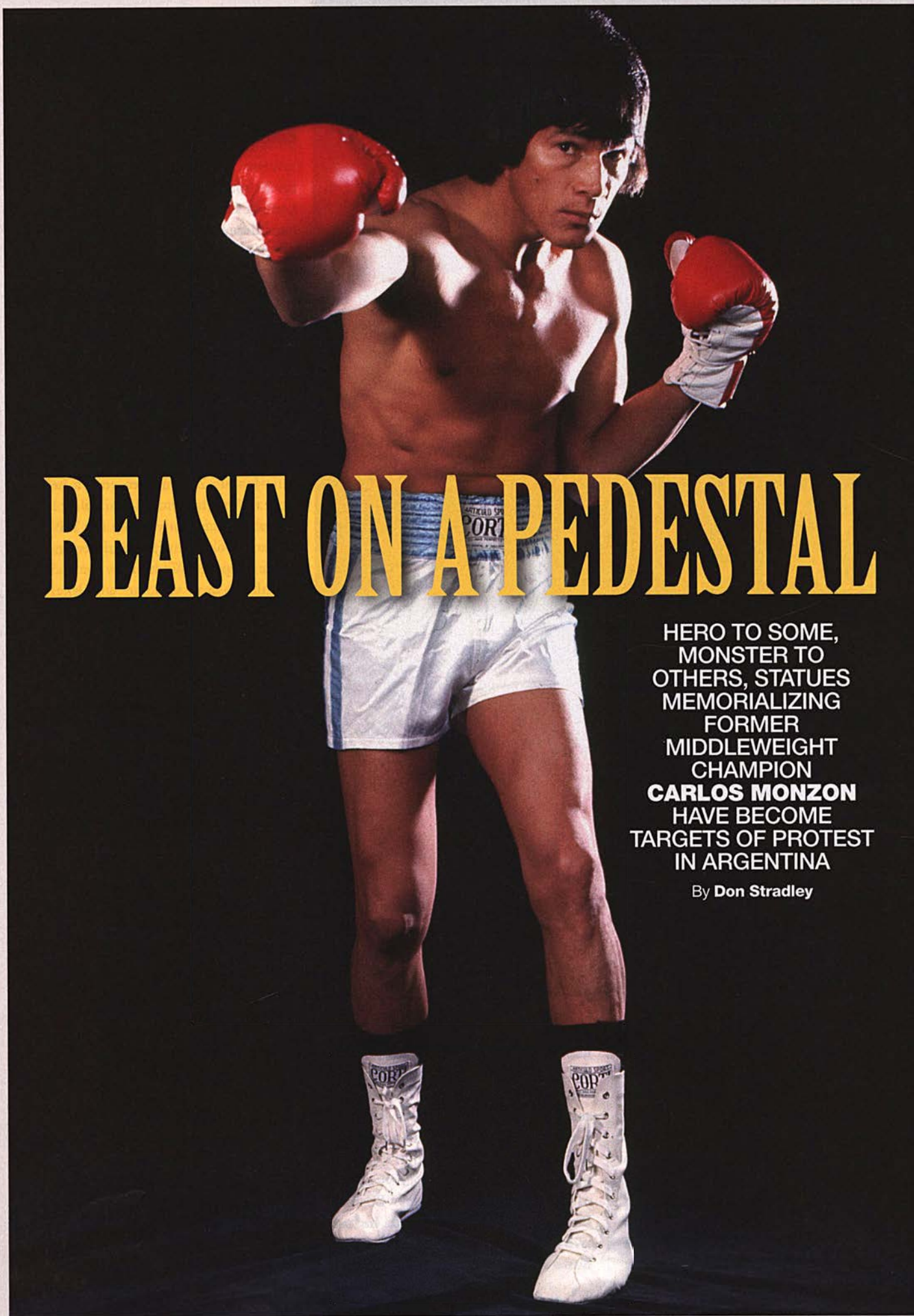
On December 2 in Saudi Arabia, Andy Ruiz Jr. and Anthony Joshua will fight for the Mexican-American's IBF, WBA and WBO heavyweight belts. Usyk is the mandatory for the WBO title, while Bulgarian Kubrat Pulev is the IBF mandatory. The likely scenario is that – due to the politics of the sport – Usyk won't have to face the Ruiz-Joshua 2 winner to grab a belt at heavyweight. Should Ruiz win, he will almost certainly dump the WBO title and look to unify with the winner of the proposed Wilder-Fury rematch. Should Joshua win, he will likely fulfill his IBF mandatory obligation against Pulev and be stripped by the WBO. So, regardless of what happens on December 2, it is quite possible that Aleksandr Usyk will fight for the vacant WBO title in just his second bout at heavyweight next spring.

"I think he'll go to Saudi Arabia and watch Ruiz-Joshua 2 live," Hearn told The Ring in an interview just before the Usyk-Witherspoon bout. "He'll be ready for the winner. But the belts will likely get fragmented. Anything can happen. But Usyk will either fight the Ruiz-Joshua winner or for the vacant belt in his next fight."

It was a smooth ride in 2018, a bumpy one with plenty of traffic in 2019, but the highway appears to be wide open for Usyk in 2020. He is no less than the second-greatest cruiserweight of all time, but can he achieve success at heavyweight? It's going to be a fun ride as the Usyk story plays out.

Michael Montero can be found on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram via @MonteroOnBoxing. His weekly podcast 'The Neutral Corner' can be heard on iTunes, Spotify, iHeartRadio and elsewhere.

ED MULHOLLAND/MATCHROOM BOXING USA



BEAST ON A PEDESTAL

HERO TO SOME, MONSTER TO OTHERS, STATUES MEMORIALIZING FORMER MIDDLEWEIGHT CHAMPION **CARLOS MONZON** HAVE BECOME TARGETS OF PROTEST IN ARGENTINA

By **Don Stradley**

The statue of Carlos Monzon that stood on Route 1 in Los Cerrillos, Argentina, has been removed. For nearly two decades, the life-sized figure had marked the site of Monzon's fatal 1995 car crash. It had also been a source of controversy.

Roberto Favaretto Forner, the creator of the piece, announced on Facebook in March 2019 that the statue would remain locked away in his workshop. He was proud of his work, but he appreciated the points made by Monzon's detractors, specifically Argentine women's groups – namely that Monzon was found guilty in 1989 of murdering his estranged wife, Alicia Muniz, and a convicted wife-killer shouldn't be glorified in public.

A renowned sculptor with works displayed around the world, Forner had the figure brought to his studio for repairs back in 2015. Not only was it worn from bad weather, but also vandals had been chipping at it. Forner's plan was to restore it and have it placed in a more protected area, perhaps elevated so vandals and grabby tourists couldn't reach it. But as he worked, he was deluged by phone calls from women's groups. Their hope was that he'd keep the sculpture out of public view altogether. Forner eventually agreed. He cited other reasons behind his decision – the location where the monument stood was neglected, and most members of the original Monzon tribute committee were dead – but the main factor was, he said, "the requests of the women."

Meanwhile, in the provincial capital of Santa Fe, a second Monzon monument is still standing. Demands to remove that one have also been made, but without success.

A marble giant standing 50 feet high and reportedly weighing 20 tons, the remaining Monzon memorial is a whopping tourist attraction on the city's riverfront. A website called "Welcome Argentina" lists it as a must-see item. The online brochure praises Monzon as a "popular idol" who had earned "the love of all Argentinian people," but makes no mention that he murdered a woman. Strangely, the brochure describes him as "not such a lucky man outside the ring," and adds, "Nobody can judge him."

Everyone knows that Monzon was a scandalous character. Yet he is still dear to the people in his home province of Santa Fe.

Carlos Monzon is idolized by Argentines of his era, but a new generation will not turn a blind eye to the murder he committed 30 years ago.

His was a rags-to-riches story. He was a poor boy who became one of the greatest fighters of all time. He mingled with royalty, acted in movies and had romantic affairs with beautiful actresses.

He reigned as middleweight champion from 1970 until his retirement in 1977. His 14 successful title defenses stood as a record until Bernard Hopkins surpassed it in 2002. But Monzon wasn't merely a boxing champion. He was a national emblem.

On February 14, 1988, Alicia Muniz was found dead outside a house where Monzon was staying in Mar del Plata. She'd been strangled and thrown from a balcony. Monzon denied any part in her death, but a panel of judges found him guilty of murder.

He was given a rather light sentence – 11 years – and by his seventh year he was only required to report to Las Flores Prison on weeknights. A good behavior furlough allowed him to train fighters in Santa Fe by day and to stay at his son's house on weekends.

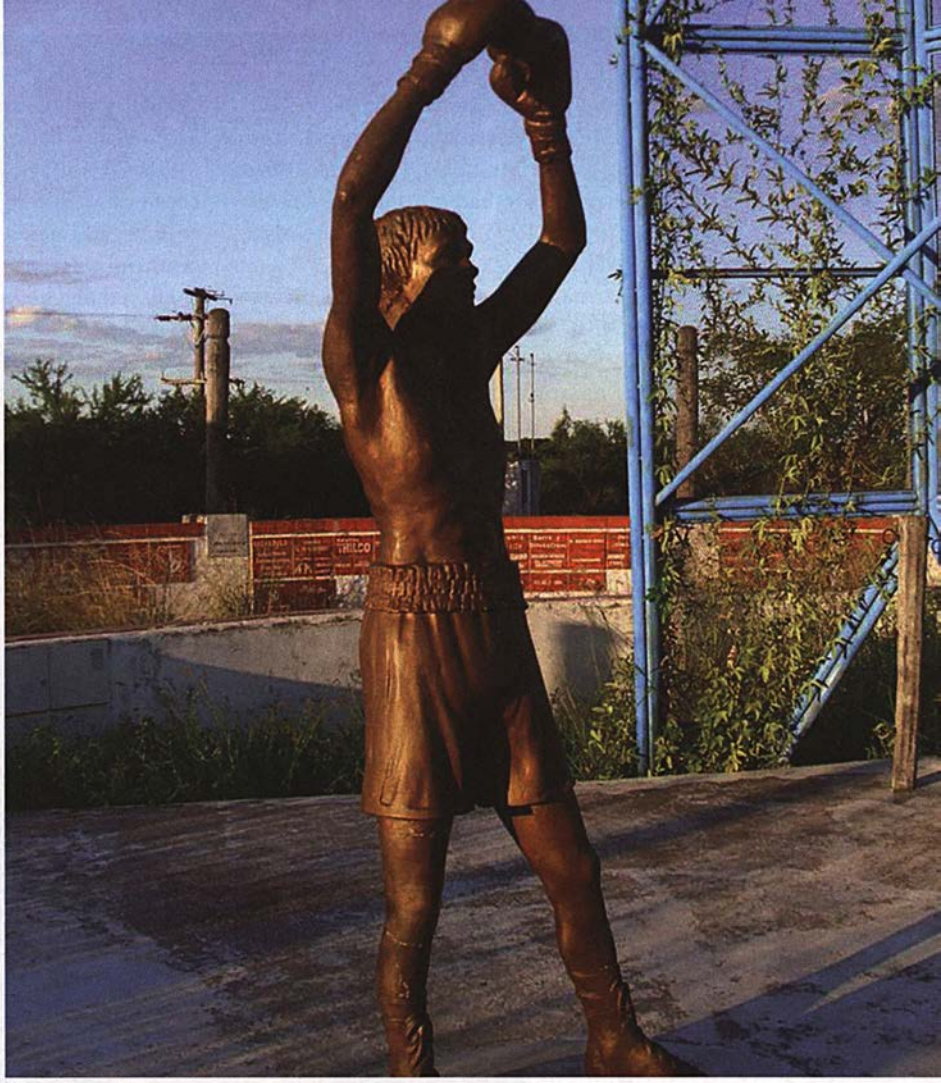
In January 1995, returning from a weekend barbecue, he was killed in a car crash.

For many in Argentina, Monzon's death at 52 seemed to absolve him of his crime. The country's president at the time, Carlos Menem, set the tone when he suggested Monzon be remembered not as a murderer, but as a great champion of Argentina. Thus began the rehabilitation of Monzon's image. In time, the murder of Alicia Muniz was viewed as a tragedy not for her, but for Monzon, who was now depicted as a man of an indigenous background who overcame extreme poverty – an inspiration for all Argentines. As for the murder conviction, his most fevered supporters believed Monzon had been wrongly imprisoned. Others felt his meager sentence had been punishment enough. On October 28, 1996, two monuments were unveiled: the monolith in Santa Fe and the stark figure in Los Cerrillos. Monzon had morphed into Argentina's tragic folk hero.

By 2010, however, opinions were changing.

On the 15th anniversary of Monzon's death, it was announced that the death-site statue had been vandalized; a large chunk of a leg had been torn away. It was believed that local kids had caused the damage, or perhaps tourists wanting a souvenir, though some wondered if feminist groups had been involved.

BEAST ON A PEDESTAL



A citizen watchdog unit was formed in 2014 to safeguard the Route 1 sculpture, but vandals still bashed away at it. More recently, someone spray-painted the monument's base with, "Where there is violence, there is no love."

When Forner went about restoring the statue in 2015, there were fundraisers to help with expenses, and a massive donation of materials, including keys, bits of plumbing – anything that could be melted down and used. Even Monzon's family got involved in the effort to repair the piece, though Forner fretted over his work remaining vulnerable to defacement.

While Forner's statue was back in the workshop, women's groups began picketing the Santa Fe memorial. Inspired by Mexican artist Elina Chauvet's "Red Shoes Project" – her installations involve hundreds of red shoes placed in public squares to draw awareness to violence against women – Argentine demonstrators began leaving red shoes at the base of the waterfront statue. In 2018, a political group created a mock plaque and affixed it to the monument. It read, "Carlos Monzon, Campeon Mundial, Y Femicida." ("Carlos Monzon, World Champion and Woman Killer.")

The plaque was a pointed reference to a phenomenon in Argentina, namely that tributes to Monzon have increasingly ignored the murder entirely, as if Monzon's turbulent home life was a personal matter best left out of the story.

Argentine journalist Carlos Irusta covered Monzon's career and wrote a Spanish-language biography of the fighter in 2017. He understands the difficulty faced by Monzon's admirers and explained his own feelings in an interview with MundoD.com.

"Appreciation for a person goes beyond certain things," Irusta said. "Maybe I'm saying something politically incorrect. A friendly journalist, who has passed away, confessed to me: 'Monzon is no longer my friend, because he killed the woman.' It's understandable. I had a hard time. Deep down, I begged God that (the murder) was not real. It was."

Attempts to portray Monzon as a brutalizer of women, as was the case in a 2019 Argentine summer television series called *Monzon*, are often met with strong rebuttals. Ernesto Cherquis Bialo, one of Argentina's most noted sportswriters, felt the series was "very offensive to the memory of those who might have been by his side." Cherquis Bialo, of course, is a prime example of the Monzon worship that overwhelmed the country. He so revered Monzon that he claims to have once pissed in a cup so the fighter could skip a post-fight drug test in Paris.

Still, there's a sense as 2020 approaches that Argentina's passion for Monzon may have peaked. The TV series, though filled with inaccuracies, portrayed him as a dark character tortured by jealousy. The Route 1 statue is gathering dust in an artist's workshop. But the waterfront memorial will have more staying power than Forner's statue, and not only because of its enormous size.

Local business owners support the colossus because of its value as an attraction. Sightseers come to the waterfront specifically to have their photos taken next to it. Then, the theory goes, they wander into the local shops. Benefiting most is a nearby restaurant once owned by "Chiquito" Ulerich, a personal friend of Monzon. Though Ulerich died in 2011, his family maintains the business; the restaurant is popular not only because of the way it prepares fish, but because it's a kind of shrine to the dead fighter, with an empty chair set aside at all times in his memory. The Ulerich family would likely fight any groups trying to have the monument removed. Still, female protestors occasionally march around the memorial, making it impossible for tourists to get close.

Silvina Sierra, an activist who has worked with the women's group

As a boxer, Monzon is worthy of monuments; he was the dominant middleweight champ of the 1970s and a bona fide star. But he had a dark side, and his violence went beyond the boxing ring.

Ni Una Menos (Not One Less), has argued that the boxing champion and the murderous symbol of "macho hate" are one and the same.

"Monzon was and continues to be the typical male stereotype," Sierra told unosantafe.com in 2017. "The one who ... like many macho men, believed that a woman is a thing that belongs to them."

In February 2018, the 20th anniversary of Muniz's death, Ni Uno Menos held a rally in the city. Roughly translated, part of their statement read: "Our objection is that we believe that no femicide – whatever his occupation or profession – can have a monument in a public space. If a scientist discovered the cure for cancer and had killed a woman, our feelings would be the same."

It appeared Muniz's supporters were being heard when Gabriela Sosa, the undersecretary for the Santa Fe Department of Gender Policies, suggested a conversation was in order, and that the statue could be replaced by something representing the rights of women. But Sosa's proposal went nowhere.

"The issue did not advance," reported columnist Victoria Rodriguez. "There was no debate." Instead, Rodriguez wrote, the women's groups were relegated to online forums, while "journalists (talked) about the great champion, the one who 'put Santa Fe on the map.'"

Rodriguez and others have commented on Argentina's aloof approach to the topic of gender abuse, and the gradual uptick of violence against females in Monzon's hometown. In Santa Fe, between May and August of 2017, the provincial government registered 3,692 reports of gender violence. A study released by Santa Fe councilor Norma Lopez reported 31 femicides in 2015, 36 in 2016, and 38 in 2017. In September 2019, the Buenos Aires Times reported 235 femicides in Argentina for the year so far, which equates to one every 26 hours. (For those wondering, America dwarfs Argentina in femicides. According to a report by the Violence Policy Center, a gun-control advocacy group in Washington, D.C., an estimated 1,706 U.S. women were killed by men in 2012.)

Monzon's devotees would insist the old champion had nothing to do with Argentina's high number of murdered women and that his personal life should be judged separately from his accomplishments as a boxer. The simple argument given, that the monument celebrates a champion, not a man strangling his wife, has been surprisingly effective in shutting down the anti-Monzon campaigners. Even Forner felt it was worthwhile to honor the most popular athlete of Santa Fe.

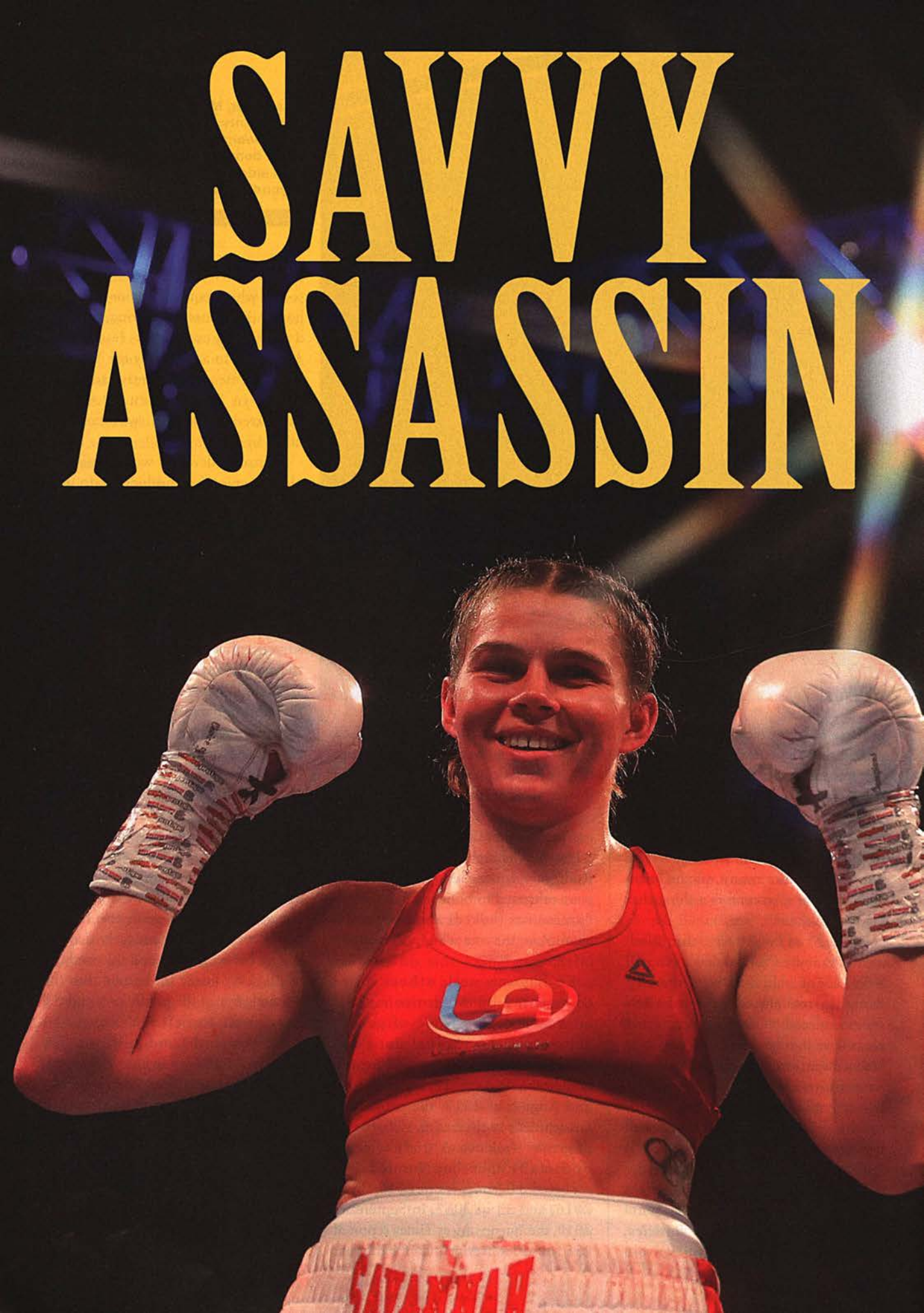
The statue from Route 1 was last seen in Forner's studio, on its back, balanced precariously on a dolly. A photograph of the statue in its current home has circulated among a few Santa Fe websites. Among Forner's many unfinished projects, the old concrete and bronze effigy seems as useful as a rusted out Chevy. Did Forner really side with the female protestors, or was he merely tired of seeing his work targeted by vandals? We'll never know for certain. But the statue is out of the public eye, and the activists can count it as a victory.

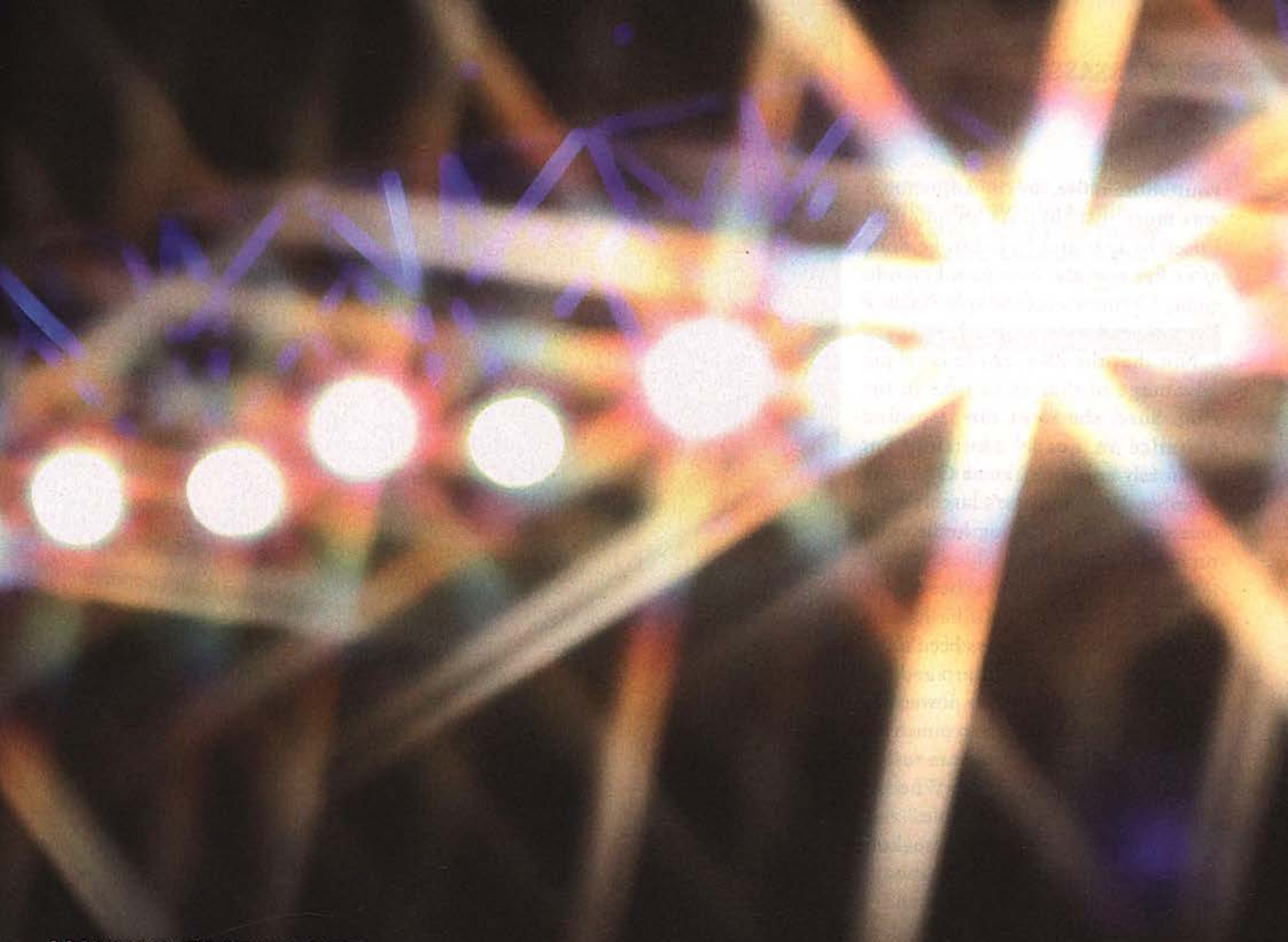
However, the monolith on the waterfront isn't going anywhere soon.

For many people in Santa Fe, the remaining monument isn't a symbol of macho hate. It represents one of their own, a man who overcame poverty.

Those who see him as a disgrace have not given up the fight. But they're learning that 20 tons of marble is nothing compared to the enduring legacy of Carlos Monzon.

SAVVY ASSASSIN





HAVING EMBRACED THE VALUE OF SELF-PROMOTION TO ACCOMPANY HER SKILLS, SAVANNAH MARSHALL IS BUILDING A ROAD THAT WILL ONE DAY LEAD TO AN OLD RIVAL

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

"The Silent Assassin" is silent no more.

No, Savannah Marshall isn't lighting up social media with trash talk and call-outs, but the two-time Olympian from Hartlepool, England, is realizing that being less silent will do more good than harm to her promising pro career.

"That's one thing I've realized about professional boxing," she said. "You need to get your name out there. The more people know you, the more money, the more you're worth. It's a funny game."

So she's more comfortable telling her story?

"A hundred percent," she laughs. "I think I've told it that many times now."

The last time The Ring checked in with Marshall, it was 2017 and she was the first lady of Mayweather Promotions. It seemed to be an odd pairing, the loquacious Floyd Mayweather Jr. promoting the shy Marshall in Las Vegas, but it did land her a pro debut on the Mayweather-Conor McGregor card in August of that year.

After that ... nothing. Fights fell through, Marshall's career stalled, and after six months of living in the U.S., Britain's first amateur world champion was ready to go home and begin again.

"Me being the type of person I am, I'm not the type to sit around and wait for things to happen," she said. "I want opportunities and I want things here and now, so that's why it kind of didn't work out with Mayweather."

An amicable split with the promoter allowed Marshall to get a fresh start back in England, where she reconnected with trainer Peter Fury and signed with Eddie Hearn's Matchroom Boxing. Since then, she's been able to get on a schedule more to her liking.

"I boxed in August and October, and then I'm scheduled to box again before the end of the year," she said. "I was kind of going at a snail's pace at one point, but now I'm at the pace I want to be at."

Owner of an 8-0 (6 KOs) record at press time, the super middleweight is settling into the pro game well, even if it took an adjustment early on.

"In amateur boxing, everything is spread over three or four rounds, so everything's rushed, everything's a hundred miles an hour," Marshall said. "Whereas in the pros, you've got 10 rounds to work your opponent out, and you can sit on

your shots more, so the adjustment was more just that. As an amateur, I used to spar and I used to be done after five rounds. As a pro, I can do eight, 10 rounds off the spin because I've adjusted to that pace."

Not that the 28-year-old is taking advantage of that extra time in the ring. Sure, she went the 10-round distance in nearly shutting out previously unbeaten Yanina Orozco in October 2018, but she's largely been more interested in going home early on fight night.

"I think I've always been able to punch," she said. "To be honest, though the power's always been there, it's only since I've turned pro and I've learned how to deliver that power that I thought, 'Wow, yeah, I can punch.' In the amateurs, everything was rushed and fast and tippy-tappy. Whereas now, you punch to hurt people."

It's a rarity to see a true knockout artist among the ladies, and though time will tell if Marshall becomes a super middleweight version of Jelena Mrdjenovich or Amanda Serrano, she admits that a lot of those finishes have to do with her level of competition as well.

"In female boxing, you've got your champions and then there's a big gap in ability, so I think that's why a lot of females get away with boxing for a world title after three or four fights. I think I'm at the level now where I need to step up, because I made it through my learning stages."

The honesty and ambition are evident, and both are still there when the topic everyone wants to talk about comes up in the conversation.

Claressa Shields.

Back in 2012, when she beat Shields in the second round of the AIBA Women's World Championship tournament in China, Marshall didn't expect that she would still be talking about the current two-division champion today.

"No, not really," Marshall laughs. "When we boxed as amateurs, I was only 20, she might have been 17, so it was a long time ago. And it was one of those times when you boxed five times in eight days. I got the win, I boxed well, I beat her convincingly and it wasn't something where I thought, 'Wow, I just beat so and so.' It was just one of those things."

Shields went on to a pair of Olympic gold medals and what is still a spectacular pro run. Marshall lost in the quarterfinals of the London and Rio de Janeiro Games, and she was ready to walk away from the sport before Money Mayweather came calling for her to enter the pro game. A big selling point for the Brit: the reality that in a combined 87 amateur and pro bouts, Shields has only lost once.

To Savannah Marshall.

"After 2016, I was ready to walk away from the sport, and then I got a call from Mayweather. And I've learned in the sport of professional boxing that I've got that win over Claressa, so maybe that gets me a little bit more money and maybe that gets me a little bit more publicity," she said. "So, in my short pro career, I've kind of learned the way people go about this, and it's not as simple as, 'I want to fight you. Let's fight.' It's all about the build-up and all about making money. So I'll talk about Claressa every day if it gets me them big bills."

Marshall laughs, but a rematch in the pro ranks is serious business, even if things aren't exactly lining up for that fight right now.

"Claressa's moved down two weight classes, so she's not even in my weight class now," said Marshall. "So although I personally feel like that fight will always be there, there's other champions in the weight at the minute for me, and it's not like Claressa is (pressuring me). I personally think that fight will always be there for me, so it's just when I want it, basically."

That's the thing. While it's Marshall's biggest fight and one of the biggest fights that can be made right now in women's boxing, she's also the one holding the aces, because it's Shields who would need – or want – it more than her.

"Maybe, yeah, because I'm the only girl who's beaten her," said Marshall. "I know she wants to avenge that loss and, really, she's boxed everyone out there, so who is there left to box for her? So the way I look at it, she needs me. So when I'm ready and when I want that fight, I know that fight will happen."

Then Marshall will really have to deal with the glare of the media spotlight. But you get the feeling that's not a bother for a young woman who has settled into the pro game and is comfortable in her own skin. And when it comes down to it, the fight is all the matters.

"I've got quite a small circle and quite a small number of friends, and in terms of social media, I'm not as big as other girls," Marshall said. "So when I go to the ring, I've trained to be the best, and I always think if I can't beat this girl, there's no point in me doing it. I don't want to be the girl who boxed for a world title; I want to be the girl who won a world title. I don't really box for anyone else, and I've always been like that."

Only now, we get to hear about it from the source. And though Marshall describes her early pro career as equal parts emotional, turbulent and exciting, she's glad she stayed.

"Yes, I am glad I stuck around," she laughs. "I fell back in love with the sport and I'm loving training, I'm loving learning and I'm happy, which is the main thing."

Savannah Marshall jabs Daniele Bastieri en route to a fifth-round stoppage on the Vasiliy Lomachenko-Luke Campbell undercard at the O2 Arena in London, England.

RICHARD HEATHCOTE

Artur Beterbiev would not be denied in the most significant fight of his pro career, a light heavyweight title-unification fight against fellow Olympian Oleksandr Gvozdyk.

HONOR THE FATHER

ARTUR BETERBIEV TRACES THE MOTIVATION FOR HIS TITLE-UNIFYING VICTORY OVER OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK TO A PREDICTION MADE LONG AGO

By **Joseph Santoliquito**

Artur Beterbiev won't forget the knock on the door that afternoon. Something wasn't right by the look of the strangers who were led into his living room. They wore rigid, grim expressions weighed down by the horrendous news they had to deliver to the Beterbiev family.

Beterbiev, 16 at the time, held his mother as he heard that his father, Sultan, had been in a serious car crash. Seven hours later, the man who fostered Artur's boxing dreams and told him that he would one day become a world champion, died from his injuries.

Artur never reached the hospital in time to see his father one last time.

"It made me very determined," Beterbiev said of the traumatic experience. "You're angry. You're sad. It was a very difficult time for our family. My dad

VALERY SHARIFULIN

was the only one working then. We didn't know what we would do. It motivated me.

"Boxing is a tough road. When it gets hard, I think about my parents; I think about my father. I don't want to let them down. I'm the youngest of five boys. My mother stopped watching my fights in 2009, because she would get so nervous. But I fight for her, and I fight in memory of my father.

"I think he would have liked to see me become a world champion."

Naturally, the first thing Beterbiev thought of after beating Oleksandr Gvozdyk on October 19 to unify the IBF and WBC light heavyweight titles by 10th-round stoppage was his father.

"It was emotional for me, I have to admit," Beterbiev told The Ring two days after the biggest victory of his career, an ESPN-televised main event at Temple University's Liacouras Center in Philadelphia. "You don't know what you'll feel like after you win a fight like that. When the ref held up my hand, I thought back to the time my dad told me two days before he died that I would be a world champion.

"That came after I took a bronze in an amateur tournament. I lost, and my father said I still won the fight."

The twist of it is when referee Gary Rosato waved the Gvozdyk fight over at 2:49 of the 10th, Beterbiev was down on the scorecards of judges John McKaie (87-84) and Ron McNair (86-85), while judge John Poturaj had it 87-83 for Beterbiev.

"I don't understand that," said Beterbiev, who was defending the IBF 175-pound belt for the third time. "I was hurting him, and he wasn't hurting me. I let him hit me to see how strong his punch was. I knew I could take it.

"That's what I did in the beginning, let him hit me to see what he could do to me and adjust that. Later in the fight, I knew I could hurt him. I felt strong, and my training was good to fight later than I fought before. I'm always looking for something new to make me stronger and make me last longer."

It was only the second time Beterbiev (15-0, 15 knockouts) had ever seen the 10th round. The first came two years ago, when Beterbiev stopped Enrico Koelling at 2:33 of the 12th after knocking him down twice in the final round.

Beterbiev forced Gvozdyk down three times in the telling 10th. The first knockdown came with 1:10 left in the round. By then, Gvozdyk had endured a wealth of punishment from body shots. A short left dropped him a second time, with inside of a minute left in the round. It was a blunt, short right that felled Gvozdyk a third time, prompting Rosato to wisely intervene.

Against Gvozdyk (17-1, 14 KOs), Beterbiev seemed to only get stronger as the fight wore on. Beterbiev landed 161 of 515 (31.3 percent) total punches, 48 of 232 (20.7 percent) jabs and 113 of 283 (39.9 percent) power punches to Gvozdyk's 118/614 (19.2 percent), 24/260 (9.2 percent) and 94/354 (26.6 percent), according to CompuBox stats.

Bearing down on Gvozdyk, Beterbiev, with his jet-black beard, chiseled body and dogged countenance, kind of resembled a real-life Wolverine of X-Men fame.

"I like that," Beterbiev said, laughing.

VALERY SHARIFULIN

Beterbiev's blend of power, physical prowess and underrated technique proved too much for Gvozdyk.

By the way Gvozdyk's punches appeared to bounce off him, Beterbiev's ability to take a shot was almost cartoonish.

"I wasn't surprised by what Artur did," said Marc Ramsay, Beterbiev's trainer. "I've seen it plenty of times in the gym. I would have liked his defense to have been better, but he caught most of what Gvozdyk threw.

"It was like a tennis game at first between us and Teddy (Atlas, Gvozdyk's trainer). We adjusted to what Teddy was trying to do, having Gvozdyk move to the right, away from Artur's power. As a trainer, you want perfection, but Artur was very effective. We were in great shape for this fight."

The light heavyweight division is an interesting mix of respected veterans, such as The Ring's No. 2-rated Sergey Kovalev (set to defend his WBO title against Canelo Alvarez soon after press time) and former champ Jean Pascal, and bona fide standouts like WBA beltholder Dmitry Bivol and former titleholder Eleider Alvarez, who went 1-1 in fights with Kovalev.

"The options are there," Ramsay said. "We have an IBF mandatory with Meng Fanlong, from China, who is a lot better than many people think. We're thinking of getting back in the ring sometime early next year.

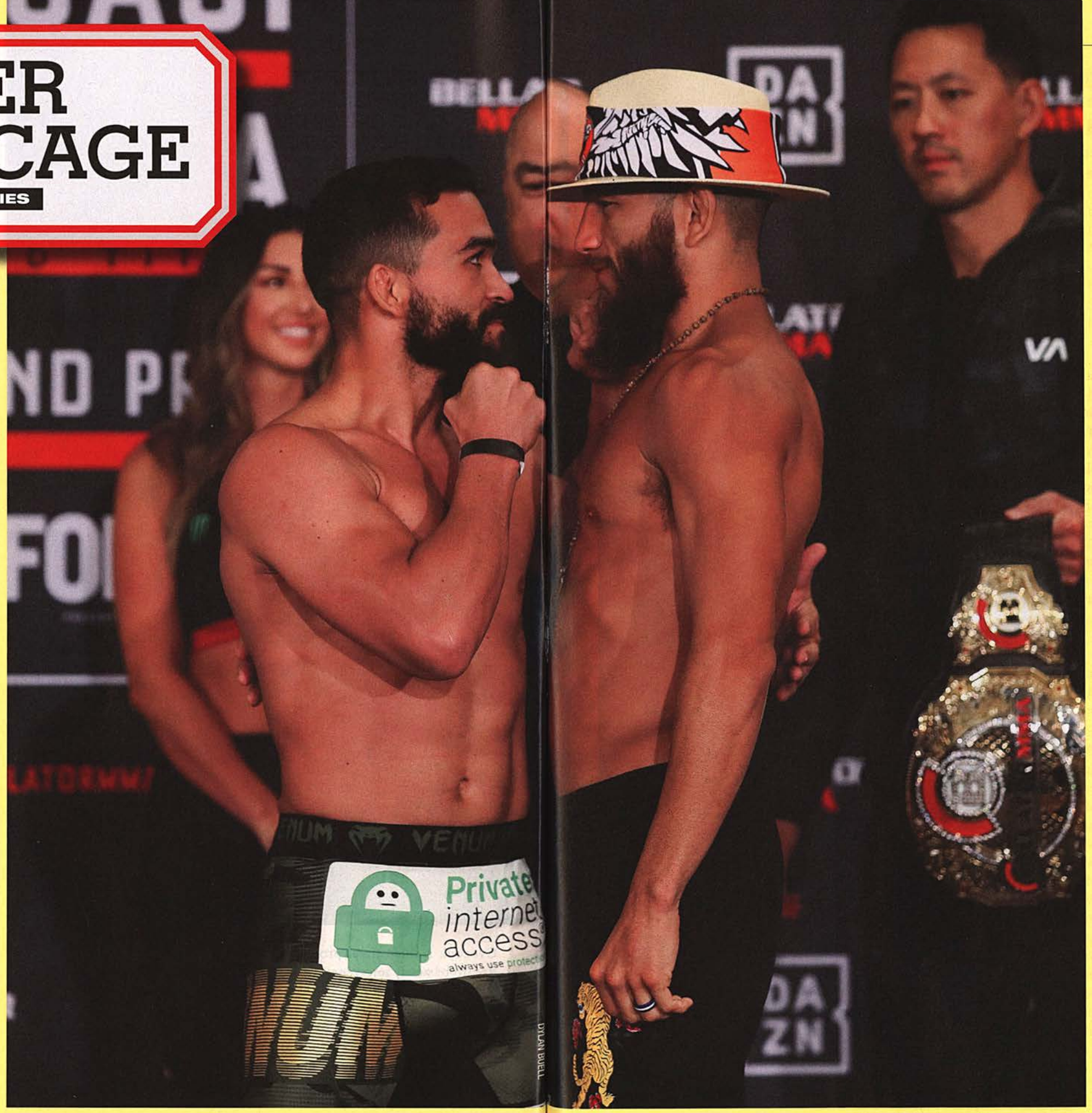
"No one knows Fanlong, but he's an Olympian who's a 6-foot-2 southpaw. Fanlong is a very good boxer, and coming from this fight with a lot of emotion, we need to be careful and be prepared. We'll look at sometime in February or maybe sometime in March."

For now, Beterbiev is basking in his emotional win.

"I like that green (WBC) belt. I wish my dad could see this," he said. "I'd like to think he is looking down on me with a smile on his face."

ENTER THE CAGE

BY GARETH A DAVIES



Patricio "Pitbull" Freire (left) and Juan Archuleta exuded confidence ahead of their featherweight championship fight.

Funny things happen in fight sports. They always do. But when Bellator's promotional brains came together around the boardroom table, the creative minds came up with a novel way of selecting the draw for the Featherweight Tournament Grand Prix quarterfinals – played out during the event itself at The Forum, the iconic venue in Inglewood, California.

Tournaments are a great thing – as the World Boxing Super Series in boxing has shown in the last two years – and what Bellator did on live television was create a moment when MMA met game show … met chess match … met reality television for the million dollar winner's prize. There were twists and turns in deciding the matchups for the next round of the year-long tournament. It was cerebral. Off the cuff. And it worked.

Eight fighters – including Patricio "Pitbull" Freire, who retained the featherweight title that night in a majestic, mature performance against a game challenger in Juan Archuleta – came through the first round in two separate events in September, and they will now go head-to-head from December through to March in what is becoming a captivating series involving arguably the strongest 145-pound roster anywhere out there in the fight world.

Bellator's current champion, Pitbull, of Brazil, is a special fighter. He looks every inch a champion, from his bearing to his body posture to his presence and decision-making in combat. The big questions now are how long he can reign for and whether he can win three successive fights to take the tournament spoils. In the cage, he has become methodical, strong – a rock in defense and attack.

Yet edging toward Pitbull is the young pretender, Los Angeles native AJ McKee. Known as "The Mercenary," McKee – who was in the corner with his father, Antonio, for the 49-year-old's 30th win in September – came out to finish his opponent, Georgi Karakhanyan, in just eight seconds. "Where's my belt?" screamed the kid who is ranked by many as the best fighter under the age of 25 in all of MMA. McKee grows louder, more accomplished and more of a threat to Pitbull with every fight. The matchup with is mouth-watering. Whenever – and wherever – it does eventually happen, it promises special depth.

This was the second-fastest KO in Bellator history. "I want my belt. Duck and dodge, champion, but it's coming. We will meet," bellowed McKee inside The Forum, having finished Karakhanyan by dropping him with a left hand, from the southpaw stance, followed by a vicious flurry on the ground. "I grew up in the streets and the struggle; I'm an LA kid, and my time is here."

★ ★ ★

CYBORG JUMPS TO BELLATOR

There was more news that night at The Forum. In January 25, back at the same venue, women's MMA legend Cris Cyborg Santos, who has left the UFC to join Bellator, will challenge for the featherweight title against incumbent 145-pound queen Julia Budd. "I'm really excited to come here and step inside the cage," said Santos, the Brazilian who

is widely regarded as the greatest female fighter of all time in mixed martial arts. "I respect Julia, and we will put on the best fight for the fans."

Budd, a Canadian who has dominated since she claimed the belt from Marloes Coenen, added: "It will be amazing. I can't wait to step into the cage against her. It's the perfect time."

★ ★ ★

AVA KNIGHT AIMING TO BE A DOUBLE THREAT

Women in combat sports are soaring right now, nowhere more so than in MMA, with Ava Knight even having crossed over to MMA to fight in Bellator, winning on her debut in September. Why did she make the jump? "I don't really have a long answer for that," Knight told me. "It's basically because I can. I've had a long career in boxing, and it's not that I don't get respect; I just wanted to try new things.

"I've been given this opportunity. I feel I can go through a little bit more pain and struggle to get to the top of another sport. I started getting really serious about it this year."

But it's tough, admits Knight, once a formidable ballerina as a young girl. "In mixed martial arts, everything is slowed down," she explained to me ahead of her debut victory. "Wrestling I've got more into, because it's where you work where you put your weight. In boxing, you're looking for the knockout. There's that aggressiveness I've had to tone down. I've been boxing for 18 years. I have a certain amount of strength. I have enough strength to get on the ground and be OK, but it's about running the movements to get where I need to be."

Always cerebral, Knight added that she wanted to do something different than Holly Holm, a champion in boxing and in the UFC. "Holly did not become a champion in both sports. She became a champion in one and then

Ava Knight weighs in for her MMA debut against Luna del Mar Torroba.

Conor McGregor announced at a presser in Moscow that he will return to the UFC in January.

switched to the other. ... I actually plan on boxing and doing MMA at the same time and being the titleholder in both. I respect Holly, but she switched over. Maybe she wasn't happy in boxing. I was never a big fan of her in boxing, but I really love what she's done in MMA. She's lost a few fights but is still trying. I'm excited to do both."

★ ★ ★

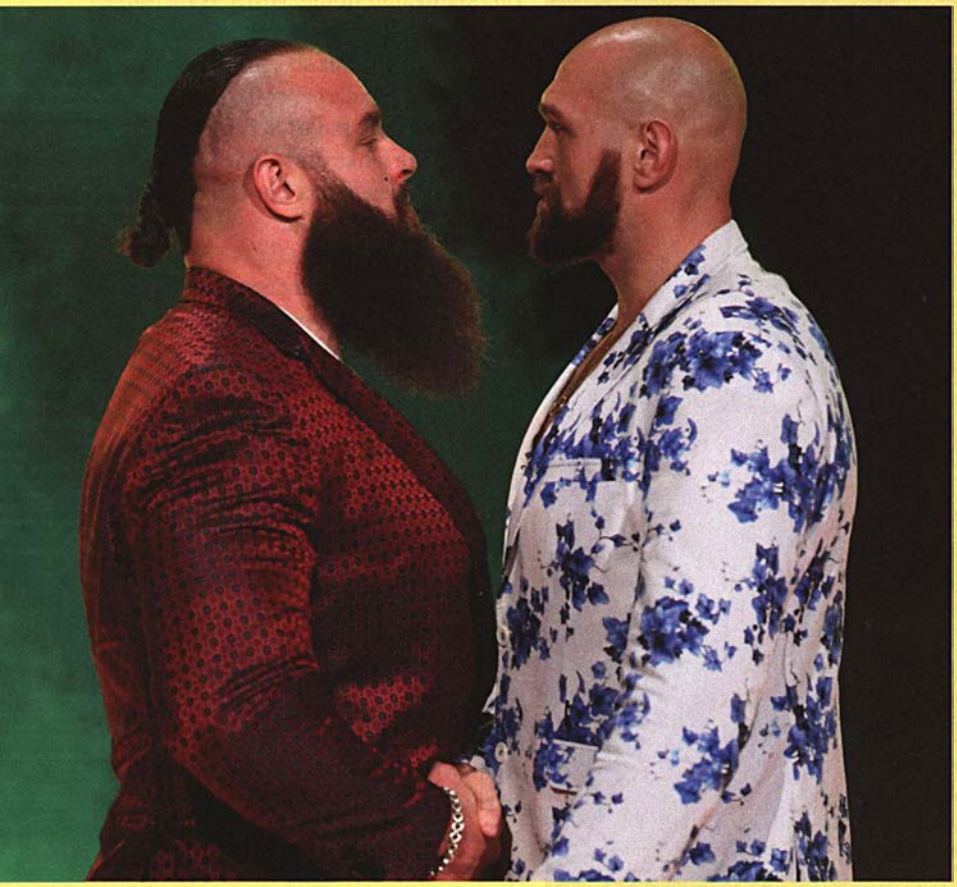
MCGREGOR'S COMEBACK IN FLUX

Conor McGregor claimed in October at a press conference in Moscow, of all places, that he will be returning to fight again in the UFC in January 2020 in Las Vegas, and that he will venture to the Octagon thrice next year. Justin Gaethje or Donald "Cowboy" Cerrone, by some accounts, will be the touted opponents, though most fans would like to see the trilogy fight with Nate Diaz materialize. The Irishman also said he would be willing to rematch Khabib Nurmagomedov in the Russian capital next year.

McGregor was conclusively defeated by Nurmagomedov at UFC 229 in October 2018 and has not fought in the UFC since then. Meanwhile, UFC president Dana White had come out with his view that "The Notorious One" – to give the irascible Irishman his fighting sobriquet – "isn't the man anymore," with White insisting that the deal for McGregor's cage return in January was yet to be finalized. Nurmagomedov, meanwhile, who does not have his next contest scheduled after his victory over Dustin Poirier in Abu Dhabi late in September, has been keeping fit by swimming for about an hour at a time – against a powerful tide in a cold river in his homeland of Dagestan, Russia.

Gareth A Davies is MMA Correspondent for the London Daily Telegraph.

WORLD BEAT



In October, Tyson Fury joined a longstanding boxing tradition of heavyweight champs entering the pro wrestling ring.

U.K.

BY GARETH A DAVIES

ENJOY THE SHOW

Dismiss any public disdain that old-head promoters Bob Arum and Frank Warren showed for Tyson Fury leaping the ropes for a temporary gig in the world of WWE. It was as fake as the combat itself. Secretly they were rubbing their hands together with such force that they might've just ignited a fire of glee.

Fury's matchup with Braun Strowman will have taken place as part of the WWE "Crown Jewel" event in Saudi Arabia by the time you read this (with the expected outcome, most likely), but two things here are of note: There was no way Fury could, or even should, have turned down the reported $12 million deal for a month out of camp (learning to act) and three appearances in a new character plot. And no amount of invested money or promotional schemes within boxing could have delivered anything near the level of PR it generated, not to mention the global exposure. Interesting, too, that Fury flew under the radar when it came to flak over appearing in Saudi Arabia – unlike Anthony Joshua and his scrap with Andy Ruiz Jr. for three belts in the dunes. Funny old world, is it not?

A behind-the-scenes television feature with Fury's family aired in the U.K. The Arum/Warren axis knows this is great publicity for Fury's boxing career – even for the release of his autobiography.

It will all add weight to the rematch with Deontay Wilder. For now, what's the rush with Fury, anyway? Why not join the World Wrestling Entertainment circus for a "fake fight" – or one that was heavily scripted – with another giant human being? My sources tell me that Fury was signed up during his fight week with Otto Wallin. The WWE executives moved quickly, spotting in his two Las Vegas fights that Fury has the charisma and character to cross over into pro wrestling as only Mike Tyson and Floyd Mayweather Jr. had in recent decades.

"Iron Mike" against "Stone Cold" Steve Austin, we might recall, WAS A BIG EVENT. So, too, was "Lil' Floyd" against the 7-foot giant "The Big Show." It was high jinks and farce, yet both were genuine box office happenings.

What we are seeing with Fury, though, is quite remarkable: a redemption story of climbing to the highest positions in sports entertainment, a move Stateside taking him into the world of showbiz in a way that might never have been acceptable in the U.K., where the boxer is still something of a pariah thanks to a series of offensive comments covering everything from homosexuality to misogyny. Even though they were four years ago, Fury will never be forgiven or

forgotten in some quarters.

Technically, Fury is still signed up for a rematch in his day job with Wilder for the WBC heavyweight title in Las Vegas next year. Though it must be said that, with those 47 stitches in his gashed right eye still healing, that February 22 date is looking less and less likely, and the real meeting perhaps three months later.

★★★

You have to applaud Josh Warrington. He completed a third defense of his IBF featherweight title with a second-round stoppage victory over little-fancied Frenchman Sofiane Takoucht in Leeds and put every rival on notice that he will pursue them for unification contests next year. But most impressive was that he treated the challenge from Takoucht as seriously as his trio of victories over his greatest rivals on this side of The Pond: Lee Selby, Carl Frampton and Kid Galahad. Warrington set about Takoucht like a man possessed, and not like the boxer who has shaken off the stigma that he is not a puncher. Warrington has now won all 30 of his fights, with this his seventh knockout. "People say I can't punch (because of that record)," he proclaimed in the adrenaline haze of victory. "So let's test it. I took my frustration in not getting a unification bout out on Takoucht." Warrington now wants promoter Warren to get him the opportunity to prove his world-class qualities in the United States. "I have made it very clear I am open to any of them," said Warrington. "Gary Russell Jr. is kicking about. Shakur Stevenson could be fighting for the WBO title. If (No. 6-rated featherweight) Xu Can wants the fight, here I am."

★★★

Women's boxing continues to thrive in the U.K., with 24-year-old Lauren Price the latest British female to be crowned a world amateur champion – albeit in less than straightforward circumstances – at the AIBA Women's World Boxing Championships in Russia. Price followed in the footsteps of Nicola Adams and Savannah Marshall, who won their crowns in 2016 and 2012, respectively. Adams has since gone on to become a professional world titleholder, and Marshall is advancing quickly under promoter Eddie Hearn, training with Peter Fury, uncle of Tyson Fury. Marshall is hell-bent on a high-profile fight against Claressa Shields, whom she defeated at the amateur Women's World Championships in 2012.

The thought of repeating the feat in the pros has never been far from her mind.

Price's coronation was in contrast to the Great Britain team management lamenting a controversial loss in late September, when they had called for greater transparency from AIBA in the wake of Frazer Clarke having been stripped of his semi-final spot at the men's World Boxing Championships (the British super heavyweight won a split decision over Maksim Babanin in Ekaterinburg, Russia,but an appeal from the camp of Clarke's Russian opponent saw the final-round scoring reviewed and the judges' verdict overturned). This time around, however, the same happened in reverse for Price in her final against Nouchka Fontijn of Holland. The Dutch boxer had initially been awarded a 3-2 victory, but it was overturned on appeal. The system remains far from ideal, however. There is no counter-appeal process.

Nonetheless, Price's gold was the highlight of a great week for GB's

Having defeated the best featherweights Britain has to offer, Josh Warrington has set his sights on his fellow world titleholders in 2020.

women with Karris Artingstall and Demie-Jade Resztan claiming bronze at featherweight and junior flyweight, respectively.

"It all feels like a bit of a dream at the minute," said Price. "It was a close fight and I did think I had won it with my work in the second and third rounds, so once it went to review I thought there was a good chance it would go in my favor. I've got Commonwealth gold, European Games gold and now World Championship gold. Now I just need to make sure I get the big one at the Tokyo Olympic Games next year to complete the set."

Gareth A Davies is boxing correspondent for The London Telegraph.

SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

Besides IBF titleholder Moruti Mthalane, there is another flyweight in South Africa to keep an eye on; his name is Jackson "M3" Chauke.

The South African champion traveled to Grozny, Russia, to take on the less experienced but undefeated Mekhdi Abdurashedov. Fighting on the road is not easy, but Chauke did so with the urgency necessary to prevail over 10 rounds by identical scores of 96-94 in a highly entertaining affair.

The Russian started well in the opening round, boxing behind a stiff jab and looping shots around the guard of Chauke. He continued the same assault in the second stanza, but Chauke suddenly woke up to the task at hand, dropping in some straight rights followed by two-fisted combinations to the body that would prove pivotal in the fight.

Chauke's signature right uppercut also found a home in the third, and when Abdurashedov drove him to the ropes in the fourth with an overhand right, it only served to kick off a fierce exchange, with Chauke's body punches clearly bothering his opponent.

That effectively set the pattern of the fight. At the start of each round, Abdurashedov would try to turn the momentum his way by either attacking or trying to box on the fly, only to be forced into trading punches with Chauke. And once that happened, the South African kept edging those rounds.

Abdurashedov tried desperately to turn things around in the final round by winging some punches, but he was arm-weary by this stage. In the end, Chauke simply outworked and outpunched his opponent and was a worthy winner.

Chauke moved his record to 19-1-1 (14 KOs) while Adurashedov dropped to 6-1 (3 KOs).

★★★

Another new face worth taking note of arrived in the form of national lightweight champion Ayanda "Greyhound" Nkosi, who took a calculated step up and stopped the more experienced Emanuel Lopez in seven rounds.

Lopez, who once held a WBA interim belt at 130 pounds and went the distance with Russian banger Shavkatdzhon Rakhimov in 2017, had no answer for his younger opponent. Nkosi utilized his height and reach advantages well, and when Lopez went down from a barrage of punches in the seventh, the writing was on the wall. The Mexican got up but was in no condition to continue, and when the towel came flying in from his corner, the referee waved off the fight.

Nkosi is now 14-1 (8 KOs) while Lopez dropped to 30-12-1 (14 KOs).

★★★

Speaking of Rakhimov, the Russian left many ringsiders in tears when he knocked out Azinga Fuzile in the eighth round at the legendary Orient Theatre in Fuzile's hometown of East London.

In a nail-biting eliminator between two undefeated southpaws for the right to challenge IBF 130-pound titleholder Tevin Farmer, Fuzile, who was touted as South Africa's top prospect for world honors, fought well and was ahead on points at the time of the stoppage, making the loss all the more heartbreaking.

Rakhimov brought intense pressure from the start and got in some hard shots on the inside, but Fuzile countered well and landed the quicker, more eye-catching combinations. A straight left toward the end of the fourth round stopped the Russian in his tracks.

A straight left-right uppercut combo in the sixth sent the sweat flying from Rakhimov's head and had the crowd on their feet. Despite catching some return fire, Fuzile blocked most of the shots well and closed the seventh with some dazzling hooks and uppercuts.

It all went wrong for the South African in the eighth, when Rakhimov landed a straight left on the button and dumped Fuzile on his back. Fuzile rose on unsteady legs and Rakhimov jumped on him, an avalanche of punches capped off by a left uppercut that deposited Fuzile face-first on the canvas, where he remained.

At 22 years of age, Fuzile can come again. It will all depend on how he handles the psychological aspect of his defeat.

Fuzile dropped to 14-1 (8 KOs) while Rakhimov moved to 15-0 (12 KOs).

As if that was not enough, footage emerged the next day of the Rakhimov corner administering what appeared to be illegal smelling salts during the break between the seventh and eighth rounds. A protest was lodged with the IBF with the outcome still pending at the time of writing.

Droeks Malan is the South African correspondent for The Ring. You can reach him via Twitter @droeksonboxing and read his blogs on couchpotatofightguru.blogspot.com.

JAPAN

BY YURIKO MIYATA

Hiroto Kyoguchi, holder of the WBA junior flyweight title and one of two Japanese Ring Magazine champions (the other is bantamweight champ Naoya Inoue), defended his titles with a unanimous decision over mandatory challenger Tetsuya Hisada on October 1 in Osaka prefecture, the deep south area where both hail from.

It was a clear victory for Kyoguchi (14-0, 9 KOs), properly scored by the judges with official cards reading 117-110, 116-111 and 115-112, but it was not easy for the 25-year-old who has already topped two weight divisions.

Hisada (34-10-2, 20 KOs) has been locally known as a self-made, tough fighter with a good punch. After many losses, he went on a 13-bout win streak dating back to 2015, climbing to the No. 1 spot in the WBA's 108-pound rankings. The 35-year-old father of three gave it his all – it took him 46 pro fights and 16 years to get to his first and maybe final shot at a world title – and he was going to make the most of it. The hard time he gave the unblemished champion prompted the Ring Ratings Panel to keep him in the magazine's junior flyweight rankings (at No. 9) following the loss.

Kyoguchi, currently based in Tokyo, worked hard from the opening bell with solid jabs, right crosses and left hooks to the body in his first homecoming fight as a world champion. The challenger, who resides in Osaka and was backed by big crowd support, was not discouraged and did not hesitate to counter with strong right hands in the second round, one of which sent the champion to the ropes. The challenger charged in the next round with combinations and left uppercuts to check the champion's straight rights.

However, Kyoguchi adjusted to Hisada's aggression with great defensive work combined with cleaner counterpunches. "Dynamite Boy" scored a knockdown with a short right hook to the temple in the ninth round. He kept the old challenger on the ropes with a barrage of punches at the end of the round, all but assuring his points victory.

"I was highly motivated with this homecoming fight to show my best performance to my friends, but Hisada was in good shape and well prepared beyond my imagination," the exhausted champion, who sported swelling around his left eye, admitted during the post-fight interview. "I handled it somehow, with all the strategy and skill I've gotten from my 13 pro fights, but I think I was able to win because I knew how to look better (to the judges).

"He was the better man, aside from my jab and right hook, which I knocked him down with. I promise to be a great champion, one that Hisada will be proud to have fought."

This was the first time Kyoguchi had experienced a domestic rivalry in a title bout, and he said it took a toll on his body, adding that he needed rest even if it meant skipping the popular annual boxing event on New Year's Eve (something he's taken part in the last three years).

"I will be back in the ring early next year to entertain people and to get a bigger fight," Kyoguchi said, perhaps alluding to the highly anticipated unification bout against The Ring's No. 1-rated junior flyweight and WBC titleholder, Ken Shiro, whom he fought four times in the amateur ranks, winning only one of the bouts.

He will be an interested ringside observer when Shiro takes on IBF titleholder Felix Alvarado in December.

★★★

After his most recent performance, there's no doubt that Junto Nakatani is a strong candidate to be Japan's next world titleholder.

The 21-year-old southpaw, The Ring's No. 9-rated flyweight, dominated former IBF junior flyweight titleholder Milan Melindo to a sixth-round stoppage in a scheduled 10-round bout contracted at a 114-pound catchweight on October 5 at Korakuen Hall in Tokyo.

Although Melindo lost his world title to then-WBA beltholder Ryoichi Taguchi in December 2017 and suffered another loss to Ken Shiro last October, Japanese fans still cannot forget the scene the Filipino veteran caused by stopping very popular three-division beltholder Akira Yaegashi in the first round in May 2017.

Nakatani (20-0, 15 KOs) used his 5-inch height advantage effectively, but he also boxed with a sound and composed strategy overall. He immediately took control of the distance with an educated jab and started his body attack in the second round. As Nakatani quickened the pace in the third and added combinations to his offense, it was clear that Melindo (37-5, 13 KOs) could not match him.

"Junto did just as he was supposed to do," said veteran trainer Rudy Hernandez, who has worked with Nakatani for five years. "He set the guy up to break him down."

In the fourth round, Nakatani caught Melindo with a left counter and continued to use left uppercuts to eventually overwhelm the shorter Filipino until the referee halted it in the sixth.

"I used my size advantage at first, then I changed gear when I was advised to go on the attack," Nakatani said after the fight. "What I did today has me confident (about my future)."

Hernandez points out what he likes about this boxer.

"He is smiling and nice to everybody outside the ring, but he can be extremely mean in the ring. He knows how to be aggressive with confidence. He is on a mission to destroy the opponent."

Nakatani has been fascinated with boxing since the age of 13 and he quickly advanced in the amateur ranks, winning the national

(under 15) tournament in 2011 with the guidance of three-time junior featherweight title challenger Kozo Ishii. Ishii passed away just before Nakatani won that tournament again in 2012, but Nakatani promised his late mentor that he would one day win a world title. A year before he turned pro in 2015, Nakatani ventured to California to experience Hernandez's old-school methods of training in the tough gyms of the greater Los Angeles area.

Hernandez remembers the boy who once visited to train with Mack Kurihara, a cousin of actor Pat Morita, famous for playing Mr. Miyagi in the Karate Kid films.

"When I saw his stance, I could tell he was a good boxer," Hernandez recalled. "He is a great student, actually. He listens well. He can adjust in the ring. And his discipline is next to none."

The calm and smiley teenager made up his mind to dedicate everything to boxing during this time in the U.S., where he stayed at Hernandez's home and borrowed a bed next to his trainer's nephew for three months. He did not know any English or Spanish, but it was not a problem for the boxing-oriented family.

When Nakatani, highly rated by the WBC and WBA, returned to America in early September to prepare for the Melindo fight, I asked him who he wants to fight in the near future. He picked out the name of Julio Cesar Martinez, The Ring's No. 4-rated 112-pounder.

"I saw his fight against Charlie Edwards for WBC title in August," he said. "The fight ended up a no-contest with his illegal punch, but he is determined and strong. It's exciting to imagine how I would fight him."

Nakatani is studying his rivals well, getting experience in the ring, and he believes he is ready for any world-class flyweight.

"Now I don't hesitate to say that I am going to fight for a world championship," he said.

Yuriko Miyata has covered the Japanese boxing scene for more than 20 years.

CANADA

BY JAMIE REBNER

In sad news, legendary Canadian trainer Abraham "Abe" Pervin passed away peacefully on September 19 in Toronto after living a remarkable life of more than 100 years. Pervin is renowned in Quebec boxing circles, having trained five world champions, including Lucian Bute, Jean Pascal and Eric Lucas, and assisted many of the province's other top fighters. One only needs to look at the outpouring of support that took place on Twitter to understand how universally loved and appreciated Pervin was.

Pervin, born in Montreal on August 13, 1919, started boxing at 16 at the Young Men's Hebrew Association in the district of Mount Royal. Like many Jewish boys at the time, Pervin had high hopes for his boxing career. However, after 20 amateur bouts, he was honest in assessing his limited future as a fighter and turned to coaching instead. That's where he found his true calling, a role he would excel at for an unfathomable 80 years. His longevity in the sport was even recognized in the Guinness Book of World Records when, in 2014 at the age of 94, he officially became the oldest boxing coach. His storied career included numerous highlights, such as being the head coach of the 1976 Canadian Olympic team at the Montreal Games and his induction into the Canadian Boxing Hall of Fame.

According to Herby Whyne, owner of Hard Knox Gym in Montreal, who spent years training fighters alongside Pervin, practically every notable boxer from the province – amateur or professional – was connected to Pervin in some way. "At one point, Quebec boxing was second only to Vegas; that's how popular it was," said Whyne. "And when you think of a name that put it on the map, Abe Pervin is probably the number one name that comes up from boxers." Pervin is also credited with opening doors for female boxers. "He had an open mind, because not many men at the time wanted to see female boxers," said former boxer Louise Provencher. "He opened the doors for us."

The thing that stood out most to me when researching Pervin's life was the lasting impact he had on the lives he touched and how respected he was among boxing's fraternity. "In my 32 years of boxing, and I mean this sincerely, he's one of my dearest friends," said Russ Anber, a longtime Montreal trainer and cutman. "I've got all the time in the world for him. He was a mentor to me. If you proved to him you were there for the love of the sport, were willing to learn and wanted to do it, he had time for you." Hall of Fame judge and referee Guy Jutras, another Montreal native, echoes how highly regarded Pervin was: "He has the utmost respect of everyone. I've never heard anything other than a compliment about his ability. I can't remember meeting one person more respected than Abe."

It's never easy to endure the passing of someone so cherished and endearing, but those who knew Pervin can take solace in the fact that he lived such a long and fulfilling life, and he left a legacy that will never be forgotten. RIP Coach.

★★★

Eye of the Tiger Management, arguably Quebec's biggest promoter, recently put on two shows at the Montreal Casino during the same week. On September 26, Steven Butler (28-1-1, 24 KOs) scored an emphatic first-round knockout over Paul Valenzuela Jr. (24-9, 16 KOs) in the main event. Butler was coming off a sluggish performance against Vitalii Kopylenko in May that saw him squeak by via split decision. Against Valenzuela, "Bang Bang" Butler

reminded everyone of his explosive power as he produced an impressive stoppage via a sharp jab. In October, it was announced that Butler would face Ryota Murata in Japan on December 23 for the latter's "regular" WBA belt, which represents by far the stiffest challenge of Butler's career.

On the undercard, Kim Clavel improved to 10-0 (2 KOs) after overcoming two cuts en route to a unanimous decision win over Romania's Xenia Jorneac (10-5, 3 KOs). Clavel, a junior flyweight, showed resilience in dealing with the blood and won with combination punching at a frenetic pace. Batyrzhan Jukembayev (17-0, 13 KOs) scored the biggest win of his career, earning a wide unanimous decision by outworking perennial spoiler Miguel Vazquez (41-9, 15 KOs). This should position the Kazakhstan native for much bigger opportunities soon.

Two days later, I was in attendance for the second Casino show, headlined by the Russian-Canadian heavyweight Arslanbek "The Lion" Makhmudov's three-round battering of tough Mexican Julian Fernandez (14-2, 11 KOs). Makhmudov (9-0, 9 KOs) used his behemoth frame to stalk and unload on Fernandez, who showed a tremendous chin and resolve in absorbing the shots. Fernandez simply didn't have the firepower to disrupt The Lion, and it was only a matter of time before the onslaught became too much. Makhmudov's next fight will take place at the Bell Center in Montreal on December 7 against long-faded veteran Samuel Peter, who will seemingly be easy pickings for Makhmudov.

Also featured was one of Canada's top prospects in super-middleweight Lexson "The Next" Mathieu (6-0, 5 KOs), who scored a scintillating first-round knockout over Juan Perez (7-9, 6 KOs) courtesy of a nasty swooping left hand. It was a devastating finish and one that only serves to elevate Mathieu's already-lofty standing as Quebec's next big star. Similar to Jukembayev, Artur Ziyatdinov (11-0, 8 KOs) picked up an important victory over a tricky veteran, beating journeyman Darnell Boone (24-25-5, 13 KOs) by unanimous decision. Boone had more success than Vazquez, as he overcame a second-round knockdown and pushed Ziyatdinov to show his mettle and skills in what amounted to a tough fight.

★★★

Max Kellerman said it right: Artur Beterbiev (15-0, 15 KOs) is an avalanche. Beterbiev started slow against Oleksandr Gvozdyk but kept picking up steam, building in confidence with each passing round until he was too powerful to contain. He overwhelmed his opponent with an emphatic 10th-round TKO to unify a pair of light heavyweight belts in Philadelphia on October 18. The adopted Montrealer's performance was an encore to his stoppage victory over Gvozdyk in the amateurs, leaving no doubt as to who the superior pugilist is. Gvozdyk put up a game effort, outboxing Beterbiev in spurts thanks to his quick hands and varied combinations, but he couldn't land anything hard enough to discourage the Russian-Canadian. Beterbiev had his most dominant round in the ninth, and after clearly seizing control of the fight, he wasn't about to let a fading Gvozdyk off the hook. He closed the show by scoring three knockdowns in the 10th before the referee wisely intervened. And it's a good thing Beterbiev forced a stoppage; he was behind on two of three judges' scorecards. Scoring the biggest win of his career, Beterbiev now becomes the man to beat at 175 pounds. But at 34 years old, he cannot afford another extended layoff if he wants to capitalize on this performance, one that was a coming-out party to the broader boxing fan base. At this point, he should only be interested in matchups with the remaining beltholders so that he can reach his goal of becoming the undisputed champion.

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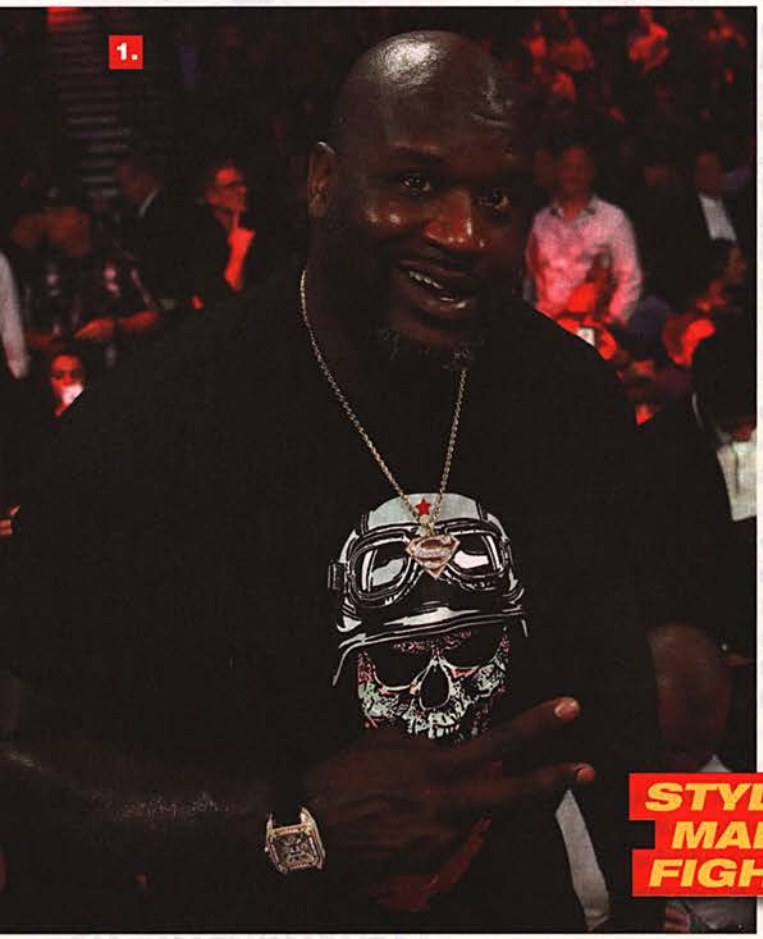

STYLES MAKE FIGHTS

At The Fights for Fury-Wallin (MGM Grand, Las Vegas) and Beterbiev-Gvozdyk (The Liacouras Center, Philadelphia): 1. Shaquille O'Neal 2. Tyson Fury and Sonny Conto 3. Teofimo Lopez & Crew 4. Paulie Malignaggi and guest 5. Timothy Bradley, Alex Rodriguez and Joe Tessitore

Pictured left to right: Jose Luis Castillo, Jr., Fernando Vargas, Jr., Bones Adams

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After eight consecutive stoppages in heavyweight title defenses (a streak which matched the record set by former champion Tommy Burns), Larry Holmes (right) was taken the 15-round distance by Jamaican brawler Trevor Berbick (left) on April 11, 1981 in Las Vegas. The bout was still one-sided, however, as Holmes cruised to a unanimous decision win. As always, the main weapon utilized by "The Easton Assassin" was a bursting left jab, which consistently threatened to snap the challenger's spine.

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COMING UP

WBC middleweight titleholder Jermall Charlo and Dennis Hogan pose during the press conference for their December 7 main event in Brooklyn.

NOVEMBER

NOV. 23 – Andrew Cancio vs. Rene Alvarado, junior lightweights, Indio, California (DAZN).

NOV. 23 – Deontay Wilder vs. Luis Ortiz, heavyweights (for Wilder's WBC title), Las Vegas (Fox PPV). Also, Leo Santa Cruz vs. Miguel Flores, junior lightweights (for vacant WBA title); Luis Nery vs. Emmanuel Rodriguez, bantamweights.

NOV. 23 – Callum Smith vs. John Ryder, super middleweights (for Smith's Ring/WBA titles), Liverpool, England (DAZN).

NOV. 30 – Zolani Tete vs. John Riel Casimero, bantamweights (for Tete's WBO title), Birmingham, England (ESPN+).

NOV. 30 – Oscar Valdez vs. Andrew Gutierrez, junior lightweights, Las Vegas (ESPN+). Also, Carl Frampton vs. Tyler McCreary, junior lightweights.

DECEMBER

DEC. 7 – Andy Ruiz Jr. vs. Anthony Joshua, heavyweights (for Ruiz's IBF/WBA/WBO titles), Diriyah, Saudi Arabia (DAZN).

DEC. 7 – Jermall Charlo vs. Dennis Hogan, middleweights (for Charlo's WBC title), Brooklyn, New York (Showtime).

DEC. 14 – Terence Crawford vs. Egidijus Kavaliauskas, welterweights (for Crawford's WBO title), New York (ESPN).

Mairis Briedis vs. Yunier Dorticos, cruiserweights (for IBF/WBO titles; WBSS final), Riga, Latvia (DAZN).

DEC. 20 – Daniel Jacobs vs. Julio Cesar Chavez Jr., super middleweights, Las Vegas (DAZN).

DEC. 23 – Ryota Murata vs. Steven Butler, middleweights, Yokohama, Japan (ESPN+). Also, Ken Shiro vs. Felix Alvarado, junior flyweights (for IBF/WBC titles); Moruti Mthalane vs. Akira Yaegashi, flyweights (for Mthalane's IBF title).

DEC. 31 – Kazuto Ioka vs. Jeyvier Cintron, junior bantamweights (for Ioka's WBO title), Yokohama, Japan.

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